FRIEND OR FOE: THE VIABILITY OF LOCAL DESIGNATION IN THE PEOPLESTOWN

NEIGHBORHOOD, ATLANTA, GEORGIA

by

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(Under the Direction of Wayde Brown)

ABSTRACT

Local historic designation's role in the revitalization of low-income, historic urban neighborhoods generally focuses on architectural rehabilitation and economic stimulation. The notion of preserving intangible elements in these areas is often overlooked, namely because of the negative impacts of urban renewal programs that drastically altered the racial and ethnic make-up of many of these neighborhoods from the 1940s to the 1970s. This thesis examines development and growth during this era in Atlanta, Georgia, and its impact on the in-town neighborhoods bordering the city's Central Business District (CBD). Using national studies for comparative analysis, it will examine how local historic designation has impacted low-income neighborhoods across the country so to explore the viability and appropriateness of local designation in Peoplestown, one neighborhood near Atlanta's CDB. The goal of this thesis is to determine whether local designation would be a contributor to higher property taxes, gentrification, or displacement in Peoplestown, which has experienced a self-generated revitalization effort that began in the 1980s.

INDEX WORDS: Historic Preservation, Local Designation, Gentrification, Neighborhood
                  Revitalization, Peoplestown, Atlanta, Georgia, Urban Renewal

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Across America, historic district designation has become a vital tool in preserving urban neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are often low-income, have a high unemployment and crime rate, and have seen significant architectural deterioration. It has become common for a city to try and revitalize these neighborhoods in an effort to bring life back to intown areas and promote economic development. In the field of historic preservation, the case for local historic designation is often aimed at preserving and protecting significant architectural character, with the intention of rehabilitating older homes to boost property values and provide better economic stability. Naturally, many other factors come into play that will affect these neighborhoods, such as the threat of gentrification and loss of community character. Additionally, the prospect of local designation can appear to be elitist and insensitive to the true "historic" qualities that helped shape these neighborhoods in the first place.

It can be argued that this facet of historic preservation creates a paradox; in an attempt to revitalize a neglected, rundown neighborhood by preserving architecture and landscapes, there is often a greater emphasis on advocating economic benefits opposed to preserving intangible elements – those that served as the historic backbone of a functioning, self-sustained neighborhood for its long-term residents. Consequently, it becomes difficult to measure how preservation fits into the equation if the tangible revitalization process causes advocates to lose sight of a neighborhood's intangible character.

Preservationists may argue that local designation is the best means of protecting a neighborhood from further deterioration. While this is a worthy strategy, and one that can be

extremely important to a neighborhood's livelihood, it is uncertain whether this strategy can

serve a purpose in low-income, inner-city neighborhoods that were greatly altered by urban

renewal and suburban flight and still avoid the paradox. This leads to the key questions of this

thesis:

- Can local designation in low-income, urban neighborhoods provide economic
  stability without raising property values, ergo taxes, and displacing long-term
  residents who are often on fixed incomes?

- Can local designation help uphold the modern-day identity in these neighborhoods
  that arose from inequalities in federal urban renewal programs and regional growth
  and progress tactics in the mid-twentieth century, or is it a precursor to gentrification?

- Is local designation an appropriate strategy for neighborhoods that lack the
  associative values of historic preservation, such as unique architectural styles or
  renowned people and events?

- Do these neighborhoods exemplify a city's residential development history, and
  therefore may need increased protection because of the threat of sprawl and new
  development?

- What other historic preservation strategies can help protect these neighborhoods and,
  if applicable, play a role in their revitalization?

Chapter 2 explores national studies of local historic district designation that focus on

demographic changes, gentrification and displacement, property values and property taxes, the

role of community-based organizations. Do the findings of these studies apply to Peoplestown

and other low-income neighborhoods that border Atlanta's Central Business District (CBD)?

Chapter 3 focuses on the history of development and growth in Atlanta in the mid-20th century, and how it impacted the neighborhoods that border the city's CBD. Specifically, how urban renewal and other programs greatly altered social and economic conditions in these areas. Some have suggested that these programs were motivated by racial discrimination and contributed to the evolution of a new neighborhood identity over the last several decades. It will include a history of the preservation movement in Atlanta and how it initially responded to the structural and economic deterioration of the city's in-town neighborhoods.

Chapter 4 provides a case study of the Peoplestown neighborhood, located near Atlanta's CBD and the Atlanta Braves baseball stadium, Turner Field. It discusses the viability of local designation in the neighborhood, using the national examples outlined in chapter 2 as a basis for comparison. The study includes patterns of development and historic preservation activity, demographics, and architectural stock, and analyzes the intriguing notion of preserving intangible elements in historic districts.

Chapter 5 outlines preservation tools and other strategies that help prevent potential negative impacts, such as higher property taxes and gentrification, if local designation is not viable. It discusses implementing these tools in Peoplestown and other non-designated neighborhoods bordering Atlanta's CBD to assist with self-generated revitalization efforts.

Chapter 6 addresses the final objective of the study – to determine whether local designation and other preservation tools heighten the threat of gentrification, displacement, and higher property taxes in intown neighborhoods, and if architectural integrity relates to the potential negative impacts. It concludes with the role historic preservation can play in protecting the intangibles – identity, character, pride, and heritage – without being a deterrent to a community's revitalization efforts.

CHAPTER 2

NATIONAL STUDIES ON THE IMPACTS OF LOCAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION IN

LOW-INCOME NEIGHBORHOODS

There have been numerous studies on the impacts of local historic designation and other

preservation strategies in low-income neighborhoods. These studies have focused on several

issues, including gentrification and displacement, property values and taxes, mixed-income

communities, neighborhood integration, the role of non-profit organizations and Community

Development Corporations (CDCs), and improving attitudes in the low-income community

towards historic preservation. An overview of certain studies will provide a better perspective of

these issues and will reveal both keys to success and common problems that arise when local

designation is used as a revitalization tool. This discussion will help analyze the viability of

local designation in Peoplestown and similar low-income neighborhoods that border Atlanta's

CBD.

Baltimore, Maryland

A popular criticism of local historic designation in low-income neighborhoods is its

potential to increase property values and displace long-term residents. The rehabilitation of run-

down, historic buildings and the subsequent higher resale value, rent increases, and regulated

maintenance can have negative impacts on the lower-income community. As this criticism has

grown over the past several decades, there has been a push towards finding ways to "combine

structural restoration with maintenance of low-income residents and to include minority

neighborhoods in preservation projects."[1] Although there are several factors involved in

accomplishing this goal, one of the most significant keys is the role of local non-profit,

community organizations in the preservation planning process.

James R. Cohen's 1998 study of the Butchers Hill neighborhood in Baltimore, Maryland

examined "the public and private sector support system for combining historic preservation with

the creation of affordable and mixed-income housing and neighborhoods,"[2] and considered

factors that involve gentrification and displacement in these areas. The study reveals important

issues that deal with revitalization in historic in-town neighborhoods, such as the contributions of

community-based organizations, combining the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) with

the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HRTC), and obstacles in promoting mixed-income

communities in low-income historic districts.

The Butchers Hill neighborhood, located in southeast Baltimore, was designated as both a

local historic district and National Register district in the early 1980s. The neighborhood is

primarily residential and features "brick row houses of different sizes and styles."[3] Butchers

Hill's revitalization began in the early 1970s when local CDCs such as Southeast Development,

Inc. (SDI) were formed to deal with issues of "housing quality, absentee landlordism, and tenant

transiency."[4] Utilizing corporate loans, SDI was able to acquire both occupied and abandoned,

boarded-up row houses, and engineered detailed restoration plans for the dilapidated buildings

before federal and state tax credit programs were available. In turn, the organization "made

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[1] James R. Cohen, "Combining Historic Preservation and Income Class Integration: A Case Study of the Butchers Hill Neighborhood of Baltimore," *Housing Policy Debate* 9, no. 3 (1998), 663.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid, 676.
[4] Ibid, 677.

Figure 2.1: Typical row house building in Butchers Hill Historic District, Baltimore, Maryland

conscientious attempts to assist displaced tenants to find other renting (or owning) options nearby,"[5] but was criticized for being indifferent to "irresponsible or disruptive tenants."[6]

The subsequent local designation of Butchers Hill in 1981 helped promote interest and investment in the neighborhood, leading to other rehabilitation projects under the direction of Jubilee Baltimore, Inc., a nonprofit housing organization formed around the same time. Once designated as a local historic district, Butchers Hill was eligible for historic tax credits. Jubilee Baltimore's primary goal was to find "creative strategies to maintain a mix of income classes in the community, in order to restore not only the architecture of earlier periods but the economic integration embodied in [the city's] original plan."[7] The organization utilized the federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HRTC) to rehabilitate historic row houses in the Butchers Hill Historic District and to offer competitive rents for both low and middle-income tenants. The organization took careful measures to screen prospective tenants, promote a mixed-race environment, and involve the community in the rehabilitation process.

Cohen's study found that local designation was successful in protecting Butchers Hill's architectural resources and helped sustain a mixed-income community in the neighborhood. There are several other noteworthy conclusions from the study that pertain to local designation and low-income neighborhoods, notably the use of the LIHTC and the HRTC. Cohen found that most states agencies, in their desire to create as much low-income housing as possible, promote "large-scale projects designed exclusively for very low income households"[8] because of minimal paperwork and greater tax credits for investors. In this scenario, attempts to promote mixed-

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[5] Ibid, 691.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid, 664.
[8] Ibid, 689.

income communities in low-income neighborhoods are less likely if a state's LIHTC program

favors exclusively large-scale projects (i.e. housing developments) for low-income residents

only. This may be detrimental to locally designated, low-income historic districts with smaller,

single family homes that need rehabilitation, as there would be less incentive for non-profits to

attract investors by utilizing the combined LIHTC/HRTC strategy. However, Cohen notes that

the combined use of these tax credits will increase "due to the recent legislative trend in several

states to constrain suburban sprawl and favor development in downtown areas that not only have

infrastructure and services in place but also a stock of historic buildings."[9]

Another important conclusion of Cohen's study was his finding that promoting a mixed-

income community in low-income historic neighborhoods does not necessarily translate to

gentrification. Tenant screening by Jubilee Baltimore (initiated by SDI years earlier before

Butchers Hill was designated a local historic district) brought primarily middle-income residents

to the neighborhood, many of whom worked in the city. In this scenario, the "upper-income"

residents were actually predominantly middle-class. Cohen notes that people who live and work

near city centers "are accustomed to being with a variety of people on a daily basis [and] are

more comfortable living among a diverse population."[10] This would be a valuable asset to low-

income neighborhoods that wish to utilize local designation as a revitalization tool, because

designation status would appeal to a wider audience of prospective tenants. The key is having a

strong, dedicated CDC that would continuously emphasize tenant screening in the neighborhood.

Indianapolis, Indiana

Another key to utilizing historic designation as a revitalization tool in low-income

neighborhoods is including established residents in the process. For these residents, the threat of

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[9] Ibid, 693.
[10] Ibid.

displacement and the regulatory elements of local designation may create negative attitudes towards municipal preservation strategies. Low-income homeowners are less likely to favor guidelines that encourage detailed, and often costly, restorations and upkeep, making it a greater challenge to find affordable restoration strategies that will strengthen pride in home-ownership and improve visual character in a district. In neighborhoods that are predominantly rental, the need to educate and inform established residents becomes more vital, in the event that landlords choose to rehabilitate their units and increase rents.

A 1985 study of two low-income, predominately African American historic districts in Indianapolis, Indiana reveals several important points concerning community involvement and attitudes in locally designated neighborhoods. For low-income homeowners in the Old Northside and Chatham-Arch districts, three preliminary factors were identified that had an influence on their contributions to architectural rehabilitation: lack of money, lack of skills, and lack of ambition.[11] These factors were driven by the impacts of urban renewal on the neighborhoods, which led to a large concentration of low-income African Americans in the area and high poverty and unemployment rates. One of the most interesting conclusions from the study states the difference in motivating factors between new residents and established residents on the issue of rehabilitating homes in a low-income historic district:

> Homeowners of different social statuses may be differently inclined to seek out or respond to contacts from preservation-oriented groups. Previous studies have shown that higher-status renovators moving into historic neighborhoods are mindful of and attracted by the design features, investment potential, and anticipated exclusivity of such areas. This may mean that they are predisposed to be conscious of their role as restorers and their common interests with others of their kind. Such selective in-migration could account for the preservation movement's emphasis on external appearances, including the not uncommon rush to restore the façade of the house while other, less-viable parts wait. Lower-status residents, in contrast, may postpone work on frills and concentrate on making the interior more comfortable, due to…limited resources or fear of unwanted attention to external signs of prosperity. They would thus be less

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[11] Timothy Maher, et. al., "Whose Neighborhood? The Role of Established Residents in Historic Preservation Areas," *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (December 1985): 270-271.

Figure 2.2. Modest historic house in the Chatham-Arch Historic District, Indianapolis, Indiana

Figure 2.3. Large Queen Anne in the Old Northside Historic District, Indianapolis, Indiana

interested in linking up with other preservationists in terms of self-identification, organizational affiliation, and so on.[12]

The authors also analyzed levels of participation in neighborhood revitalization efforts between new and incumbent residents in low-income historic districts. For the neighborhoods in this study, "there was no evidence of significant personal assets among the longtime residents that promise[d] to lead to incumbent upgrading [and] newcomers were generally in a better position to shape the revitalization process self-consciously, in their own interests."[13] New residents "had tried to influence others to move into the area…were somewhat better able to define historic preservation…and were more aware of the neighborhood organization."[14] Because of these factors, the authors predicted that newer residents would be more active in the revitalization process and the neighborhood would be at risk for gentrification. The authors conclude with several important points that relate to the impacts of local designation on low-income, urban neighborhoods:

> In both districts the revitalization process seems headed toward a mixture of small-scale incumbent upgrading and large-scale gentrification. Unless there is substantial intervention by public or private organizations, few of the long-time homeowners seem likely to remain and fix up their houses…Only by considering the assets of both long-term residents and recent arrivals will urban policymakers come up with a coherent agenda for neighborhood renewal – one sensitive to short term as well as long-term benefits, serving the needs of affluent as well as poor citizens.[15]

New Orleans, Louisiana

Kim Keister's 1991 profile of the Lower Garden Historic District in New Orleans, Louisiana reveals both the vital role of community organizations in neighborhood revitalization and the importance of recognizing the needs of low-income, long-standing residents. Operation

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[12] Ibid, 274.
[13] Ibid, 277-278.
[14] Ibid, 277.
[15] Ibid, 278-279.

Comeback, a local nonprofit, was committed to helping homeowners in the district "help

maintain the houses of long-term owners who tenaciously stayed on but [found] themselves

unable to undertake the work themselves."[16] The neighborhood, which saw a large population

decline in the 1960s due to urban flight, had suffered decades of economic decline, crime, and

inadequate services for residents that remained.

Operation Comeback utilized a revitalization strategy that would "demonstrate an

unwavering commitment to the neighborhood, market the area relentlessly, and provide financial

and professional assistance to prospective homeowners."[17] Interestingly, the organization

marketed homes in neighborhood "as aggressively as any suburban developer,"[18] but was still

steadfast in its goal to assist incumbent residents in the home-purchasing process. Keister

outlines Operation Comeback's strategy:

> Whenever possible, buyers are steered to lending programs financed by state and city
> bonds that offer below-market financing for low- and moderate-income first time homebuyers.
> Volunteer architects advise the potential buyer on exterior renovations that restore of maintain
> the exterior architectural integrity and provide interior renovation plans that meet the buyer's
> needs and budget. After maximum mortgage eligibility is determined, the specific costs are
> calculated for purchase and renovation. The buyer then negotiates directly with the seller.
> When a deal is struck, Comeback steps in, purchases the house with funds obtained from its
> lines of credit, holds title, and dispenses funds throughout renovation. When work is complete,
> the buyer's mortgage repays Comeback – purchase price, renovation costs, and all interim
> financing charges.[19]

Although the Lower Garden district saw great social and economic changes in previous

decades, it was able to avoid severe demolition and loss of architectural resources. The

neighborhood featured numerous examples of unique architectural styles that would appeal to

young professionals and other prospective new residents. Keister's article does not mention the

notion of tenant screening as noted in the Baltimore study, but does point out that there was a

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[16] Kim Keister, "New Orleans Comeback," *Historic Preservation* (January/February 1991), 34.
[17] Ibid, 35.
[18] Ibid, 32.
[19] Ibid, 69.

Figure 2.4. Historic building in the Lower Garden District, New Orleans, Louisiana

"degree of discontent…among renters, particularly on blocks that hadn't reaped the program's rewards."[20] This is an important criticism, as renters are typically the majority in low-income neighborhoods, but members of Operation Comeback stressed that rehabilitating both vacant homes for low-income residents and owner-occupied homes was a priority at the time. Through its various revitalization strategies in the Lower Garden district and elsewhere, the organization hoped to create "truly mixed neighborhoods – architecturally, economically, and racially – all over the city."[21]

<div align="center">Texas (various cities)</div>

As mentioned earlier, local designation has the potential to increase property values and property taxes, which could be detrimental to low-income residents in a locally-designated district. Aside from the design review process and the role of community organizations in neighborhood revitalization, the prospect of higher property values can be the most critical issue that affects low-income communities. Without proactive efforts to maintain affordable housing, a rapid increase in property values can be a considerable contributor to gentrification and displacement.

While historic designation is generally thought to have a positive impact on property values, evidence on this subject is mixed. Results vary depending on the quantity and quality of historic structures in a neighborhood, proximity to commercial amenities and public institutions, and neighborhood demographics. A 2001 study of nine Texas cities that examined the effects of local designation on property values suggested that positive impacts of historic designation include "a form of insurance of future neighborhood quality…by fostering neighborhood pride [and having] positive spillovers for neighboring areas, whereby designation of a district leads to

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[20] Ibid, 34.
[21] Ibid, 69.

ripple effect of rehabilitation and upgrading."[22] Some of the negative impacts indicated in the

study include restrictions on alterations and demolition, expensive maintenance work, and limits

on the "highest and best" management of properties by preventing conversions for alternative

use.[23]

The authors of the study analyzed appraisal data in the nine cities to determine the

impacts of local designation on property values, finding that there was a general increase. They

claim that in the cities where "historic designation has a statistically significant effect on

property values, historic designation is associated with average property value increases ranging

between approximately 5 per cent and 20 percent of the total property value."[24] The authors add

that the subsequent higher property taxes that result from these increases should encourage

municipalities to implement "special property tax incentives for the rehabilitation of designated

properties."[25] While this study shows that local designation can be a positive contributor to a

neighborhood's economic status, it warns of the possibility of gentrification and displacement in

lower-income communities. The authors suggest that tax incentives geared towards low-income

homeowners "would dampen displacement pressures [and] target assistance to where it is

needed."[26]

A 2004 study of inner-city historic districts in Fort Worth, Texas, also found that local

designation had increased property values, but found no evidence of widespread gentrification.

The study used census tracts to examine "the impact of the existence and extent of historical

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[22] Robin M. Leichenko, et. al., "Historic Preservation and Residential Property Values: An Analysis of Texas Cities," *Urban Studies* 38, no. 11 (2001): 1974.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid, 1981.
[25] Ibid, 1984.
[26] Ibid.

preservation on tract demographic and housing characteristics."[27] Many designated areas had

high rental occupancies and a low home-ownership rate, indicating numerous low-income

residents in the districts. However, the authors state that local designation "produced no

significant change in neighborhood demographic composition,"[28] even a decade after the

neighborhoods had been designated. Higher property values, they found, had "little effect

on…measures such as vacancy rates and rates of owner-occupancy," and did not create

"dramatic economic development benefits" for the neighborhoods.[29] Much like the previous

Texas study, the authors feel that local designation is only a partial solution to neighborhood

revitalization if low-income residents are not included in the process. They recommend "more

direct measures in central-city areas – such as incentive programs to promote the purchase of

vacant housing by owner-occupants"[30] – as one possible solution.

<div align="center">Conclusions</div>

The goal of examining these studies has been to help explore the feasibility of local

designation in Peoplestown and similar neighborhoods that border Atlanta's CBD. All of the

issues discussed are pertinent to the prospect of local designation in these neighborhoods because

of similarities in demographics, racial make-up, and developmental history.   Although many

revitalization strategies have been implemented in Atlanta, it remains unclear whether local

designation is the most appropriate strategy for the Peoplestown. A history of Atlanta's urban

renewal programs, commercial and recreational development and growth, and preservation

activity will help underscore the importance of finding ways to protect the neighborhood and

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[27] N. Edward Coulson and Robin M. Leichenko, "Historic Preservation and Neighbourhood
Change," *Urban Studies* 41, no.8 (July 2004): 1588.
[28] Ibid, 1598.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid, 1599.

those that have similar qualities. It will also reveal the demographic, racial, and ethnic changes

that occurred, along with social and economic decline, that re-shaped the identity of Peoplestown

and other communities, sparking a self-generated revitalization effort that continues today.

These issues will help determine whether local designation in Peoplestown is viable and

appropriate.

CHAPTER 3

GROWTH, DEVELOPMENT, AND PRESERVATION IN ATLANTA

The city of Atlanta has seen immense levels of growth and change over the past sixty years. The most significant changes that took place after World War II, such as highway construction and commercial expansion, had the greatest impact on the neighborhoods that border the city's Central Business District (CBD). Once self-sustaining, economically stable, and ethnically and racially mixed, these neighborhoods became predominately African American by mid-century as whites fled for the suburbs. In turn, as many parts of these neighborhoods were targeted for urban renewal, a greater level of social and economic decline took place for low-income blacks that could not afford to move elsewhere.

The city's goal to improve its standing as a major commercial center in the South today seems racially motivated, as "slum clearance projects, urban renewal, and land condemnation for expressways and other public uses almost always seemed to grab land inhabited by blacks."[31] What transpired was the displacement of low-income residents, overcrowding, and inadequate public housing that created a whole new social and economic environment in the CBD neighborhoods. To discuss the viability of local designation in Peoplestown, it is important to summarize the development surrounding these areas and the controversial policies that affected them the most.

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[31] Sanford H. Bederman, "Black Residential Neighborhoods and Job Opportunity Centers in Atlanta" (Master's Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1973), 107.

<u>Urban Renewal and Racial Barriers</u>

The early stages of Atlanta's rise to a booming Southern metropolis were based on a business-oriented philosophy that became a major player in the city's political channels. While other Southern cities were dealing with the Civil Rights movement in controversial ways and were in the national spotlight, Atlanta labeled itself as a city "too busy to hate" by the 1960s. The process of creating this image was overseen by a "leadership group [that] was all white, all male, and a small, aggressive elitist body."[32] Although this group did not represent the majority of the city's population, they were able to use their political influence to modify government programs in a manner that helped promote investment in commercial growth and at the same time create buffers between white and black communities.

Urban renewal is generally defined as "the process of buying, clearing and improving unused or underutilized land in slums and blighted areas of a city."[33] The first federal program in America that addressed urban renewal, the Federal Housing Act of 1949, encouraged this clearance process "to provide more and better housing and to attract commercial development."[34] Flaws in the country's mid-century urban renewal programs have been documented for quite some time. In many cases, areas up for condemnation were redlined and property owners were not eager to maintain their properties when the threat of condemnation was eminent. Since this was most commonly occurring in low-income neighborhoods, properties deteriorated faster and became eyesores in the minds of city officials. In this sense, the already blighted areas that were threatened by urban renewal rapidly became "slums" that were labeled as unlivable and

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[32] Truman A. Hartshorn, *Metropolis in Georgia: Atlanta's Rise as a Major Transaction Center* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1976), 11.
[33] Research Atlanta, *Urban Redevelopment in Atlanta* (Atlanta: Research Atlanta, 1979), i.
[34] Ibid.

Figure 3.1. Typical slum neighborhood, early twentieth-century Atlanta

unmanageable. In its place, the trend was to build buildings and structures that encouraged

commercial growth and large-scale housing projects for displaced, low-income residents.

The city of Atlanta followed this trend. Its leadership group was eager to attract business

and commercial activity, but did not seem overly concerned with better housing and

neighborhood revitalization in the slum areas that were targeted for urban renewal programs.

One reason behind urban renewal programs in Atlanta was the city's desire to promote itself as a

hub for conventions and sporting events, which meant a greater need for hotels, restaurants, and

other amenities linked to commercial growth in the downtown area. Federal laws and guidelines

that initiated urban renewal programs across the country had broad parameters, which enabled

local governments to "use their own condemnation authority and federal assistance to assemble

tracts of property and change land uses in accordance with their own priorities."[35]

Atlanta's Central Business District (CBD) was the primary area targeted for urban

renewal programs. By the 1960s, most neighborhoods on the fringes of the CBD were low-

income and inhabited by African Americans. Many parts of these neighborhoods were severely

neglected, unsanitary, and did not have the same city services found in white neighborhoods.

Now labeled "slums" by local government officials, it became clear that the best way to improve

these areas would be to eliminate the deteriorated housing and implement urban renewal

strategies. Consequently, a large amount of slum housing was bulldozed, and in its place the city

constructed convention and civic centers but did not sufficiently provide "more and better"

housing for the residents that were displaced.

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[35] Clarence N. Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent: System Bias in the Urban Renewal Program of Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 53, 55.
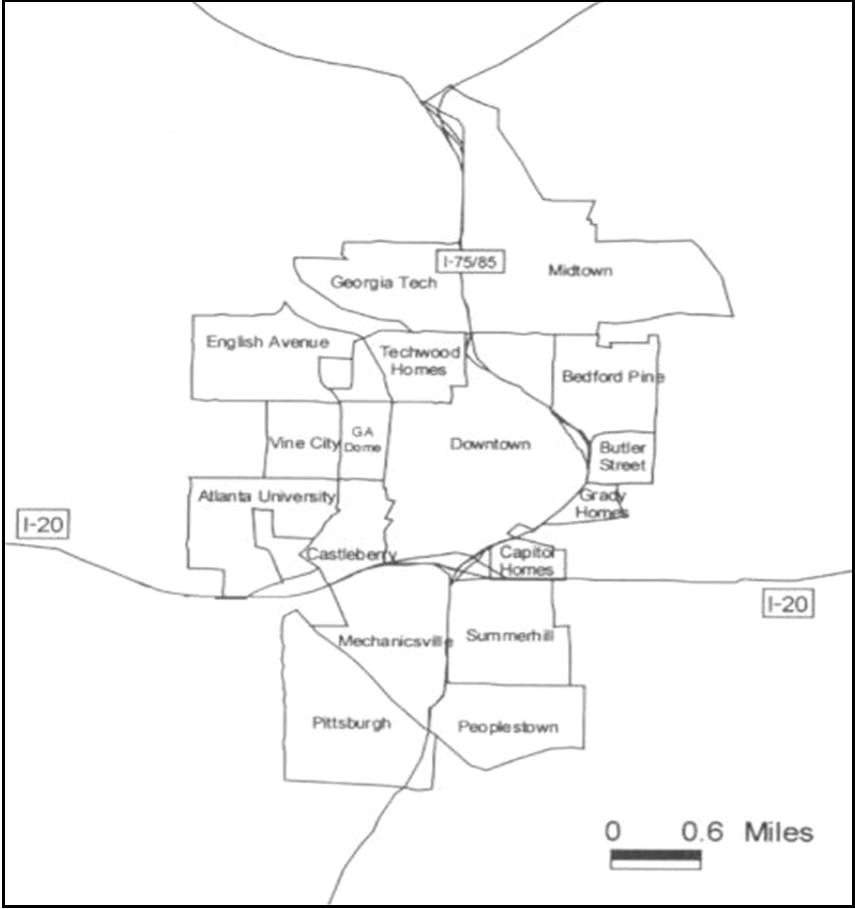
Figure 3.2. Atlanta's Central Business District neighborhoods

What transpired in Atlanta was a wave of urban renewal programs that created racial

barriers and were not beneficial to the majority of African Americans who lived in the

neighborhoods near the CBD. The Atlanta Civic Center was built directly in the middle of a

low-income, African American neighborhood called Buttermilk Bottoms that had seen a great

deal of deterioration. Instead of working with the neighborhood, the city chose to bulldoze a

portion of the housing stock and an elementary school that served the community in order to

build the Civic Center. Displaced residents were forced to relocate to sub-standard public

housing in other parts of the city. Once the Civic Center was completed, more urban renewal

funds were used to tear down the rest of Buttermilk Bottoms, which wiped out a piece of

Atlanta's history and development almost instantaneously. The concept of neighborhood

preservation was not a priority to city officials; they felt that commercial development in the

CBD would be the best defense against further social blight that threatened the growing white

suburbs in Northern Atlanta.

By the late 1960s, public housing projects that were built to ease the transition of

displaced residents "isolated its black inhabitants or severely overcrowded black

neighborhoods."[36] It became clear that the city was intent on solving the problems of poverty,

race, and affordable housing by keeping it separated from the CBD and the white middle-class.

Author Ronald Bayor sums up the impact of urban renewal on modern-day Atlanta:

> In a number of cases, blacks either were not allowed to use the land for housing or saw their
> housing destroyed in an effort to move the black population away from downtown and, in the
> northern area, away from affluent whites. When these renewal policies were combined with
> suburban counties' refusal to build public housing and the federal government's and bank's
> discriminatory mortgage insurance and loan policies, it should not be surprising to see the
> results today: a city still residentially divided by race.[37]

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[6] Ronald H. Bayor, "Atlanta: The Historical Paradox," in *The Atlanta Paradox* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000), 46.
[37] Ibid.

Figure 3.3. Buttermilk Bottom in the early 1920s

Other strategies, such as zoning and highway construction, had "confined Atlanta's blacks – 43.5 percent of the city's population – to a mere 22 percent of the land by 1965."[38] The transitional period when whites were leaving the neighborhoods and a high concentration of poor African Americans were moving in caused a of decline in living conditions. Real estate agents, desperate to fill up houses that were being abandoned, often misled low-income residents to move into neighborhoods that they could not afford. This caused a large amount of foreclosures and contributed to the overall blight of the CBD neighborhoods. Disinvestment was also taking place, caused by redlining by lending institutions that saw little potential for economic growth because of the large concentration of low-income African Americans into the area.

Because of racial barriers being established at this time, the white community continued a mass exodus out of the city, a trend that had already taken place in other large cities across America. In the process, "the affluent whites who led the suburban exodus were replaced by immigrating, poor blacks who came to Atlanta's inner city in increasing numbers, as work opportunities in southern agriculture declined."[39] The lack of city support for these areas led to a greater level of social and economic decline, and continued to isolate the African American community. Gradually, the CBD neighborhoods that once were integrated and functioned as an extension of the city's commercial center became overcrowded and underprivileged. For over fifty years, in can be argued that these neighborhoods have experienced a social and racial transition as a result of not only flawed urban renewal programs, but improper city planning and management as well.

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[38] Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 83.
[39] Stone, 46.

<u>Highway Construction and Transportation</u>

Another aspect of growth and expansion in Atlanta that had a negative impact on the

neighborhoods near the CBD and contributed to racial barriers was the construction of major

interstates within the city and a lack of sufficient public transportation. Interstate construction in

large cities across the country revealed a pattern similar to urban renewal programs that cleared

low-income housing; condemnation of areas targeted for a new interstate made them a liability

for investors and property owners, contributing to their decline and eventual bulldozing. New

interstates that sliced through neighborhoods did not contribute any positive elements since they

were often based on providing quick and easy automobile access for outside travelers and

suburbanites. The end result was a wasteland of construction sites and lack of amenities for

those who lived near the interstates.

Transportation issues in Atlanta often involved aspects of racial inequality. African

Americans in the city were already reminded of their inferior status by being segregated from

whites on public buses and streetcar lines late into the 1950s. As new transportation amenities

were being planned for the city, they were again treated like second-class citizens. From the

early 1940s to the mid-1970s, there were numerous plans and strategies that overwhelmingly

showed how "transit was planned to serve the white business community and the white

commuter."[40]

In the mid-1940s, the city devised a plan to improve access in and out of the CBD. The

1946 Lochner Report outlined the plan for new interstates that would reach out to all corners of

the city, which opted to avoid construction in vacant industrial areas that would have had a

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[40] Bayor, in "Atlanta: The Historical Paradox," 53.

Figure 3.4. Highway construction in downtown Atlanta, early 1950s

minimal impact on CBD neighborhoods.[41] In the process, city officials "hoped that the highway

and future development alongside it would create a buffer between the CBD and the remaining

portions of these neighborhoods."[42] The new interstates discouraged local business and

employment opportunities, forcing many residents to find jobs elsewhere without the proper

training or means of transportation to get to work. Those living in the suburbs, however, found

new, convenient access to the CBD without having to deal with the social blight in the

surrounding areas. Other smaller highways were built to the west and north of the CBD to create

more buffers between the white and black communities.

The Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) also seemed to plan its

transportation goals to discourage neighborhood improvement around the CBD. Train lines that

were constructed in the 1970s were intended to provide better access to the CBD, much like the

interstate system. Many low-income African American neighborhoods and housing projects,

notably Perry Homes in West Atlanta, were promised an extension of the rail lines but never

received them. A majority of Cobb County residents who fled the inner-city years earlier "were

fearful that mass transit would bring blacks to the county,"[43] and helped vote down any

expansion of MARTA into their territory. The construction of the west line MARTA rail also

destroyed homes and commercial businesses, and displaced black residents. This phase of

Atlanta's development revealed how "other transportation needs [were] frequently ignored,

including improvements catering to those who both live and work in the city, not to mention the

neglect of neighborhoods" in the CBD.[44]

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[41] Larry Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 91.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Hartshorn, 40.
[44] Ibid, 32.

African Americans living in the CBD neighborhoods were again forced to adapt to these changes without having strong vocal support from outside sources. Their social and cultural lifestyles were constantly reshaping to coexist with transportation development. Author Samuel L. Adams experienced this while investigating housing and transportation issues in 1976:

> Virtually all public transportation terminates in or near the heart of the city; transfers from lines serving the Negro community to lines serving the white community generally require a walk of several blocks. At about 8 a.m. on regular work days, the downtown sidewalks are crowded with Negro domestic workers making their way to work in white homes, a trip that may take up to two or three hours each day if the waiting periods are included. The normal economic and commercial interests of the city would be served by an efficient circulation system. The city is presently constructing a circumferential highway that will permit circular travel at the edge of the city, but the benefit here is for motorists rather than public transportation.[45]

As has been documented in this chapter, the "interests of the city" did not properly serve the African Americans who lived near the CBD and who were a major part of Atlanta's history and growth.

Historic Preservation in Atlanta

The vast development that has taken place in Atlanta over the past sixty years has taken a toll on the city's historic resources. Atlanta's desire to become the southern hub for conventions, tourism, office parks, and sporting events led to unrestrained commercial growth and new infrastructure systems which required new construction. In the process, the city lost many of its older structures, and historic neighborhoods near the CBD were either drastically altered or replaced by new buildings. With the economic and social decline that followed, there was a critical need for new planning strategies that would improve living conditions in these neighborhoods. An overview of Atlanta's preservation movement and revitalization efforts by non-profit organizations will outline the city's response to these issues.

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[45] Samuel L. Adams, "Blueprint for Segregation: A Survey of Atlanta Housing," *New South* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1976): 79.

In the United States, historic preservation attained national recognition with the passing

of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966, during the peak of urban renewal programs in

Atlanta. The city responded that year by creating a Civics Design Commission (CDC), whose

role "was largely advisory as it made recommendations for local properties listed on the National

Register of Historic Places," but also "permitt[ed] the demolition of many older buildings when

they stood in the way of new structures."[46] The CDC changed its name to the Atlanta Urban

Design Commission (AUDC) in 1973, and, with support from Mayor Maynard Jackson,

attempted to prevent the destruction of several historic buildings that were in the path of the new

MARTA rail that was being constructed. Although unsuccessful in persuading the transit

authority to spare these buildings, the AUDC did manage to save and designate a number of

historic buildings over the next decade that were not in the vicinity of new development.

The AUDC's political influence gained strength during the early term of Atlanta's next

mayor, Andrew Young, who "spent much of his time promoting investment in the city to

audiences of business people throughout the world [and] paid little attention to neighborhood

activists and preservation advocates."[47] By the mid-1980s, however, the AUDC achieved public

and media support of its mission to preserve historic buildings, and experienced a greater level of

success in designating buildings and landmark structures. Part of this success was due to tax

credits for the rehabilitation of historic buildings as outlined in the Economic Recovery Tax Act

of 1981. Still, there were constant battles between the AUDC and Mayor Young, who struck

another blow to preservation advocates by vetoing a "three-month moratorium on demolition

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[46] Harvey K. Newman, "Historic Preservation Policy and Regime Politics in Atlanta*," Journal of Urban Affairs* 23, no. 1 (2001): 73.
[47] Ibid, 74.

permits for historic buildings" that was approved by the city council.[48] As a result, more historic

structures were torn down to make way for modern office buildings.

A city-wide field survey of Atlanta's historic resources that began in the mid-1970s was

completed in 1985, incorporating "235 sites and 43 districts designated or proposed as [AUDC]

areas."[49] After years of persuasion and growing media attention, Mayor Young conceded to the

AUDC and its supporters and agreed to work with the commission on preparing a comprehensive

historic preservation plan for the city in 1987. This resulted in Atlanta's revised preservation

ordinance in 1989, which outlined expanded levels of protection for buildings and districts:

- **Landmark Buildings, Sites, and Districts** – this is the highest level of protection for

  buildings and sites "whose demolition or destruction would constitute and

  irreplaceable loss to the quality and character of Atlanta,"[50] and calls for a certificate

  of appropriateness (COA) for any proposed exterior alterations to, or demolition of,

  the building, site, or structures within a landmark district's boundaries. The AUDC

  would review all COAs to allow or deny proposed changes. The only threat to

  buildings in a landmark district is if the city's Economic Review Panel finds undue

  economic hardship to the building's owner, which would then allow demolition.

  Still, Atlanta's landmark designation status is one of the strongest in the country.

- **Historic Buildings, Sites, and Districts** – this designation has a lower level of

  protection, as

  > Historic Buildings and contributing buildings in Historic Districts…can
  > be demolished only if the owner already has detailed plans and financing

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[48] Ibid, 75.

[49] Atlanta Urban Design Commission, *Atlanta's Lasting Landmarks* (Atlanta: Atlanta Urban Design Commission: 1987), 5.

[50] City of Atlanta, *Atlanta City Code* (1989), Ordinance No. 1989-52, Sections 16-20.001 to 16-20.004

in place for a replacement building and has received a foundation permit
from the city to begin work on the new structure.[51]

A COA is still necessary, however, for all other proposed alterations or demolitions.

- **Conservation districts** – This is the lowest level of protection, as the AUDC can only serve an advisory role for proposed alterations/demolitions in these districts.[52]

Atlanta's historic preservation ordinance also outlined the process for creating local historic districts. Part of this process involves "the creation of a sub-ordinance within the local zoning code specifically for that local historic district [which] details exactly what protective restrictions on use and appearance are placed on the historic district within the legal boundaries for the area."[53] According to the AUDC's guidelines, the designation process can be initiated by a neighborhood, whose responsibilities include gathering signatures of approval by property owners, conducting a photographic survey of the area, and filling out a designation report for the AUDC to review, before a public hearing is held and final approval is given from the AUDC.[54] Since the implementation of Atlanta's historic preservation ordinance, the city has designated 44 landmark buildings and sites, 8 historic buildings and sites, 7 landmark districts, 5 historic districts, and 1 conservation district.

<u>Preservation and Revitalization in Neighborhoods near Atlanta's CBD</u>

In a city with a history of unchecked growth and development, Atlanta's historic preservation movement has been successful at retaining many historic buildings and sites.

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[51] Richard C. Collins, A. Bruce Dotson, and Elizabeth B. Waters, *America's Downtowns: Growth, Politics, and Preservation* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1991), 31.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Lee Alexander Webb, "The Economic Impact of Local District Designation: A Comparison of Atlanta Neighborhoods" (Master's Thesis, University of Georgia, 2000), 3.
[54] Atlanta Urban Design Commission, "Fact Sheet – What it Means to be a Landmark or Historic District," online at <http://www.atlantaga.gov/government/urbandesign/faq.aspx>

Mayor Young's initial attitude towards preservation advocates could have spelled doom for the

movement, but the "fact that the ordinance exists and that a review process…take[s] place has

raised the consciousness of preservation issues among property owners and developers."[55] In the

low-income neighborhoods near the CBD, a loss of architectural resources due to urban renewal

and interstate expansion, along with growing social and economic ills, posed a challenge to the

city's preservation professionals. These areas needed both protection from future growth and a

revitalization strategy to help improve living conditions for long-standing residents. One of the

first steps was recognizing how these areas had changed after suburban flight and urban renewal,

in effect creating a predominantly African American community without an equal share of

opportunities or amenities as those who had left for new suburbs in North Atlanta.

One initial acknowledgement of the unique heritage in these neighborhoods came early in

the city's preservation movement, and from an outside source. In 1988, Frederick Williamson,

the State Historic Preservation Officer for Rhode Island, spoke to the task force that was

appointed to develop Atlanta's historic preservation ordinance. Williamson noted how

> historic preservation had been adopted by a class of eager entrepreneurs as good
> business…historic preservation not only seeks to retain the lofty and uplifting parts of our
> heritage, but also the failures of that same heritage that have to do with the struggles of some
> Americans to rise out of servitude and oppression. His presentation to the task force carried
> great weight in a majority African American city that was struggling to understand the meaning
> of much of its history that involved the segregation of the races by powerful forces of law and
> custom.[56]

In 1991, the AUDC and the Atlanta Preservation Center (APC) helped coordinate another project

that focused on African American history in neighborhoods near the CBD. "Stories Worth

Sharing: The Heritage of Atlanta's Historic African American Neighborhoods" was a

"microcosm of black settlement and accomplishment in the city, from the Civil War to just after

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[55] Newman, 84.
[56] Ibid, 77-78.

World War II."[57] Through interviews with long-term residents and a slideshow presentation, the

goal of the project was to draw attention to African-American history and growth in Atlanta and

raise awareness of the city's historic preservation program in the African-American community.

Three neighborhoods were highlighted – Reynoldstown, South Atlanta, and Mozley Park – to

illustrate their importance to Atlanta's history and "the importance of preserving the remaining

buildings that represent their history."[58] The AUDC and APC hoped that this project would help

encourage community leaders to consider National Register nominations for the neighborhoods

and local historic designation as well.

Central Atlanta Progress (CAP), a private, non-profit organization that focuses on

improving downtown Atlanta and its surrounding areas, has also been an advocate for

preservation strategies in neighborhoods near the CBD. In its Central Atlanta Action Plan

(CAAP) report released in March, 2000, CAP outlined the importance of preserving historic

structures and neighborhoods in and around the downtown area. The report's segment on

historic preservation highlighted the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic District and the

Fairlie-Poplar commercial district, one of the first commercial areas in Atlanta, as two examples

of successful revitalization efforts by means of rehabilitating historic structures. It also included

strategies for revitalization in less-significant neighborhoods such as Peoplestown. Many of the

strategies are associated with local historic designation, such as to "encourage neighborhood

diversity, rehabilitate existing housing stock, preserve [the] historic character of the community,

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[57] Michelle Hiskey, "Saving the Community's Heritage," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 26 December 1991, A1.
[58] Karen Huebner, "Stories Worth Sharing: A Multicultural Project for the City of Atlanta," *The Alliance Review*, Summer 1992, 3.

enforce and encourage property owner responsibility, [and] strengthen economic development."[59]

Today there is active cooperation and awareness between the city and the neighborhoods concerning preservation and planning issues. The AUDC's mission is comparable to that of many preservation commissions in municipalities across the country – identify and protect historic buildings, sites, and districts, raise preservation awareness, and promote quality design in the city's built environment,[60] - and the commission's staff has done numerous surveys in the neighborhoods near the CBD. Three have been designated as local historic districts – Adair Park, West End, and Grant Park. The city's 2004 Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP) has a detailed chapter on historic resources. One of the primary goals introduced in this chapter is "to preserve the character and livability of Atlanta's neighborhoods and strengthen civic pride through neighborhood conservation," and notes how "there are neighborhoods (or large parts of neighborhoods) in the city that were substantially developed immediately after World War II which could now be considered eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places."[61]

Although status as a National Register Historic District is effective for achieving both nationwide recognition and tax credits for commercial rehabilitation projects, it does not guarantee protection for historic structures. Only through local designation can this be accomplished, a course of action that is best initiated from within the community to ensure that all property owners and long-term residents are educated on the benefits of local designation and are included in the decision making process. For the low-income neighborhoods near Atlanta's

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[59] Central Atlanta Progress, "Central Atlanta Action Plan," unpublished report, March 2000.
[60] City of Atlanta, "Atlanta Urban Design Commission," available online at http://www.atlantaga.gov/government/urbandesign.aspx
[61] City of Atlanta, "Comprehensive Development Plan," available online at http://apps.atlantaga.gov/citydir/DPCD/Bureau_of_Planning/BOP/CDP/comprehensive_development_plan.htm

CBD, these points are exceptionally important. Increased protection for these areas is vital for preventing future large-scale developments, and local historic designation is one possible solution. Since community action is needed to begin the designation process, along with sufficient historic resources, there has to be strong, well-structured neighborhood organizations. Even if these elements apply, however, is does not mean that local designation is viable or appropriate for every neighborhood near Atlanta's CBD. To continue this discussion, the following chapter will provide a case study of the Peoplestown neighborhood to determine whether local historic designation is feasible for this area and similar neighborhoods in the vicinity.

CHAPTER 4

THE VIABILITY OF LOCAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION IN PEOPLESTOWN

Development and growth in the city of Atlanta had a negative impact on African American neighborhoods surrounding the city's Central Business District – an impact that can still be seen today. Controversial land use policies enabled the city to separate white and black neighborhoods and create buffers between the CBD and the African American community. Overcrowding, lack of sufficient and sustainable public housing, and less-then-adequate city services forced the African American community living near the CBD to adjust to severe lifestyle changes. Over the past sixty years, a new identity has emerged in these neighborhoods due to the questionable administration of urban renewal programs.

By the 1980s, when urban renewal programs had come and gone, there was a wave of revitalization movements within the local community that spawned several neighborhood organizations. Coming at a time when the historic preservation movement was growing across the country, local revitalization in these neighborhoods was progressing without pronounced assistance from Atlanta's local government – a fact not surprising given the history of the city's redevelopment strategies in these areas. Over the past decade, there has been greater cooperation between the city and the neighborhoods in revitalization efforts. However, the notion of establishing local historic districts in these neighborhoods has only been pursued moderately by community organizations, mainly because of the social decline and architectural deterioration that occurred due to urban renewal.

This chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of the Peoplestown neighborhood, located several blocks from the CBD and adjacent to the Atlanta Braves baseball stadium, Turner Field.

Peoplestown was an area that suffered from urban renewal programs and was also involved in recent land use controversies surrounding the 1996 Olympics, which were held in Atlanta. A historic neighborhood that was established in the late-nineteenth century, Peoplestown started a revitalization effort in the 1980s that continues today. The process has focused on providing affordable, improved living conditions for long-term residents while avoiding further displacement through gentrification. While the revitalization effort in Peoplestown has had mixed levels of success, there remains a lingering question as to whether historic preservation has a role in this process and if local designation is appropriate.

<div align="center">Humble Beginnings</div>

The history of early Peoplestown is one marked by economic stability, racial diversity, and self-sustaining growth. The neighborhood, possibly named after the Peeples family who owned a great deal of land in the area, originally developed in the 1880s along railroad lines that made up its north and south borders, and the first settlers were middle-class railroad workers.[62] By the early 1900s, it became a more fashionable district as streetcar lines continued to be constructed along major streets. Large Victorian homes were built in prominent locations for upper-class whites with smaller, single-family residents in alleys that typically housed African American servants. As the area grew in population, the neighborhood saw an increase in "both racially integrated sections and an enclave of exclusively black residences."[63] The area was still predominantly rural and streetcars were the major source of transportation into the city.

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[62]Carleton Basmajian, "History of Peoplestown," unpublished research work, June 2002, online at<http://www.arch.gatech.edu/~dapa/casey/neighborhoods/peoplestown/library/local/peoplestown_history.html>

[63] Larry Keating, "Peoplestown – Resilience and Tenacity Versus Institutional Hostility," in *Rebuilding Urban Neighborhoods: Achievements, Opportunities, and Limits*, ed. W. Dennis Keating and Norman Krumholz (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999), 33.
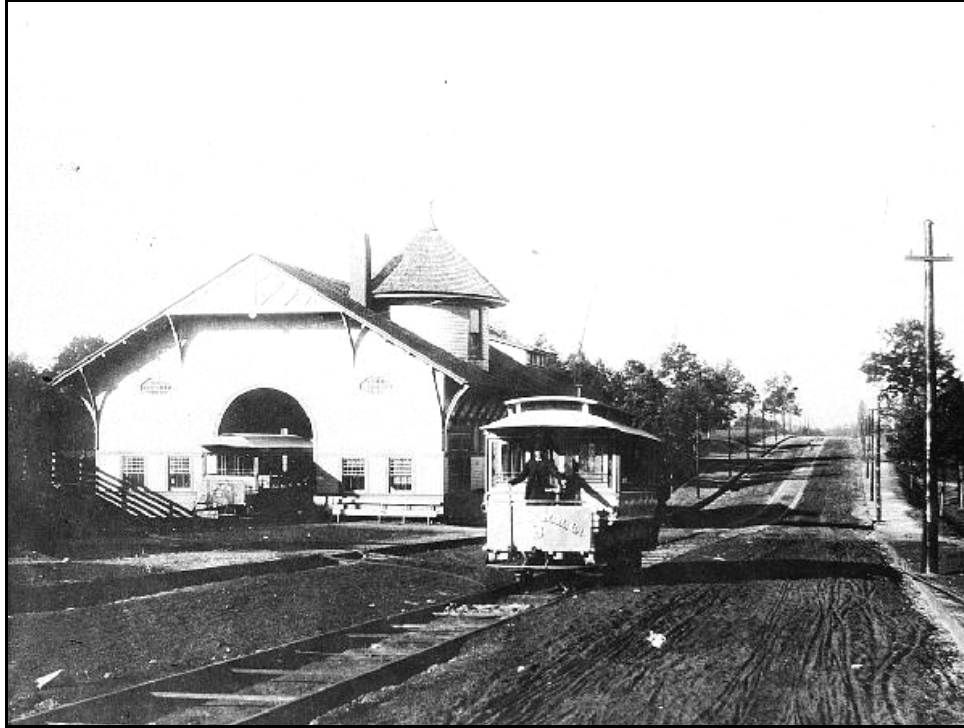
Figure 4.1. Typical streetcar line to Atlanta suburbs, late-nineteenth century

Peoplestown's most productive and prosperous era was during the 1920s and early 1930s. This was a time when

> commercial and industrial businesses were well established along Ridge and Milton Avenues in the southern part of the community. Peoplestown along with neighboring Mechanicsville and Summerhill had grown into vibrant and tight knit communities. Considered small towns unto themselves, all three communities were marked by economic stability. The population as a whole was racially, economically, and ethnically mixed.[64]

The ethnic mix included a large Jewish population that had settled in Peoplestown and remained there until the suburban exodus in the 1950s. The Great Depression caused a temporary lapse in the neighborhood's economic growth and "middle-class black families that could afford to began relocating to the rapidly evolving west side…while upper-class whites began moving to the new north side neighborhoods."[65]

Still, the first decades of Peoplestown's existence reflected a time when neighborhoods functioned in the true sense of the word. Although there were sections of the neighborhood divided by race and class, Peoplestown was small enough to create a self-sustaining community whose livelihood depended on a peaceful co-existence between all who lived there. A vibrant commercial center on Georgia Avenue, just north of Peoplestown, also served the neighborhood and others nearby, creating a tight-knit nucleus of communities around Atlanta's city center. Ethel Mae Mathews, a long time resident of Peoplestown, summed up the neighborhood's vitality and strength during this time in a 1998 interview, declaring, "Peoplestown was a people's town. Rich Jews, poor blacks, rich, white, just mixed in together. We had drug stores, grocery stores, a theater."[66]

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[64] Pollard Community Web Portal, "The Peoplestown Community," online at
<http://www.atlantacommunitytech.com/pollard/communityhistory_peoplestown.htm>
[65] Basmajian, in "History of Peoplestown."
[66] Ethel Mae Mathews, interview by Alicia Corral, 7 January 1998, in "Peoplestown: Resilience and Tenacity," unpublished report by Larry Keating, 7.

<u>Urban Renewal and Stadium Construction in Peoplestown</u>

By the early 1950s, Peoplestown was still experiencing economic stability, thanks in part to post-World War II prosperity that was found across the country, and an integrated population that "was 57% white and 43% black."[67] By the end of this decade, however, urban renewal and White Flight drastically changed the neighborhood's structure and racial composition. Interstate construction, a new baseball stadium, and other land-clearing projects caused displacement and overcrowding in Peoplestown almost overnight.

The first phase of Peoplestown's decline was a city plan for a new north/south interstate to run through the city for providing better access to the CBD and new suburbs that were being developed in North Atlanta. The plan for the interstate "was shifted from a proposed route on the west of the CBD (which would have been elevated over [a] 'railroad gulch' area) to a route that looped around the eastern periphery of the CBD."[68] A large portion of the Peoplestown neighborhood was directly in the path of this new route. Once approved by the city in the early 1960s, the new Interstate 75/85 "replaced the western edge of the neighborhood [and] demolished 110 primarily single-family homes, separating Peoplestown from the Pittsburgh neighborhood."[69] The interstate was widened a few years later, which resulted in the "demolition of approximately 50 residences and 15 businesses in Peoplestown."[70]

Following the construction of Interstate 75/85, Atlanta Mayor Ivan Allen petitioned for a new baseball stadium to be built on cleared land just east of the interstate that was originally slated for public housing as part of urban renewal plans. The spontaneity of this decision was traced to a 1963 visit from Charles O. Finley, owner of the Kansas City Athletics baseball team,

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[67] Basmajian, in "History of Peoplestown."
[68] Stone, 53.
[69] Keating, in *Rebuilding Urban Neighborhoods*, 36.
[70] Ibid, 40.

Figure 4.2. "Railroad Gulch" area where Interstate 75/85 was originally proposed

Figure 4.3. Aerial photo of Atlanta, 1940 (white line represents the current borders of Peoplestown, although the neighborhood extended further north and west at this time of this photograph)
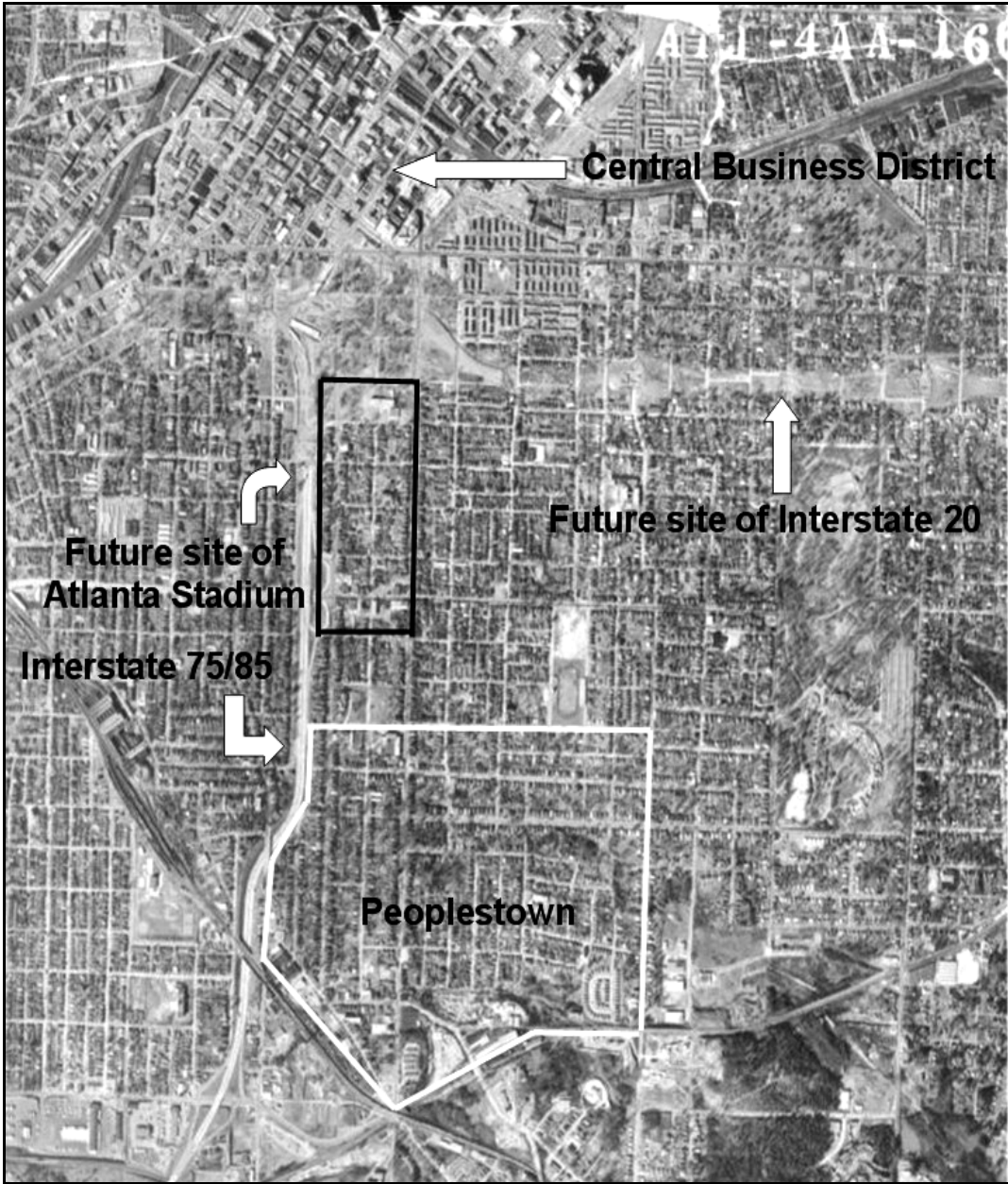
Figure 4.4. Aerial photo of Atlanta, 1960, with Interstate 75/85 running west of Peoplestown

to survey possible sites for a new stadium and relocation of his team. Skeptics argue that Allen's decision to change the use of this land was motivated by a desire to prevent the construction of public housing near the CBD and to use the stadium as another buffer between low-income neighborhoods and downtown.[71] The new stadium was quickly approved in 1964 and an agreement was made with the Milwaukee Braves to relocate to Atlanta. The impact was felt in Peoplestown and other adjacent neighborhoods immediately; the destruction of blocks of single-family homes for parking lots, the re-direction of traffic flow to accommodate baseball fans, and the elimination of commercial businesses on Georgia Avenue that served the community for decades all contributed to Peoplestown's decline.[72]

The greatest blow to Peoplestown was the lack of fringe benefits from the stadium to the local community. The new interstates shuttled stadium-goers in and out of the area quickly and easily, as the lack of local commercial amenities gave them no reason to stay around before or after ballgames. The commercial center in downtown Atlanta, being separated from the stadium by government buildings and expressway interchanges, was not easily accessible and actually saw a decline in commercial activity after the stadium was built. This was a result of land use strategies that focused on parking and freeways and not on commercial growth or community revitalization. The new stadium and interstate, combined with "suburbanization of the Atlanta Jewish population, school integration, and racial fears had ended Peoplestown's 80-year history and integrated neighborhood by 1970…that year's census showed 99% of the homes to be black-occupied."[73] Without adequate public housing, the neighborhood became overcrowded and economically depressed with the threat of further urban renewal projects in the area.

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[71] see Stone, 97, and Keating, in *Rebuilding Urban Neighborhoods*, 37.
[72] Keating, in *Rebuilding Urban Neighborhoods*, 37-38.
[73] Ibid., 38.
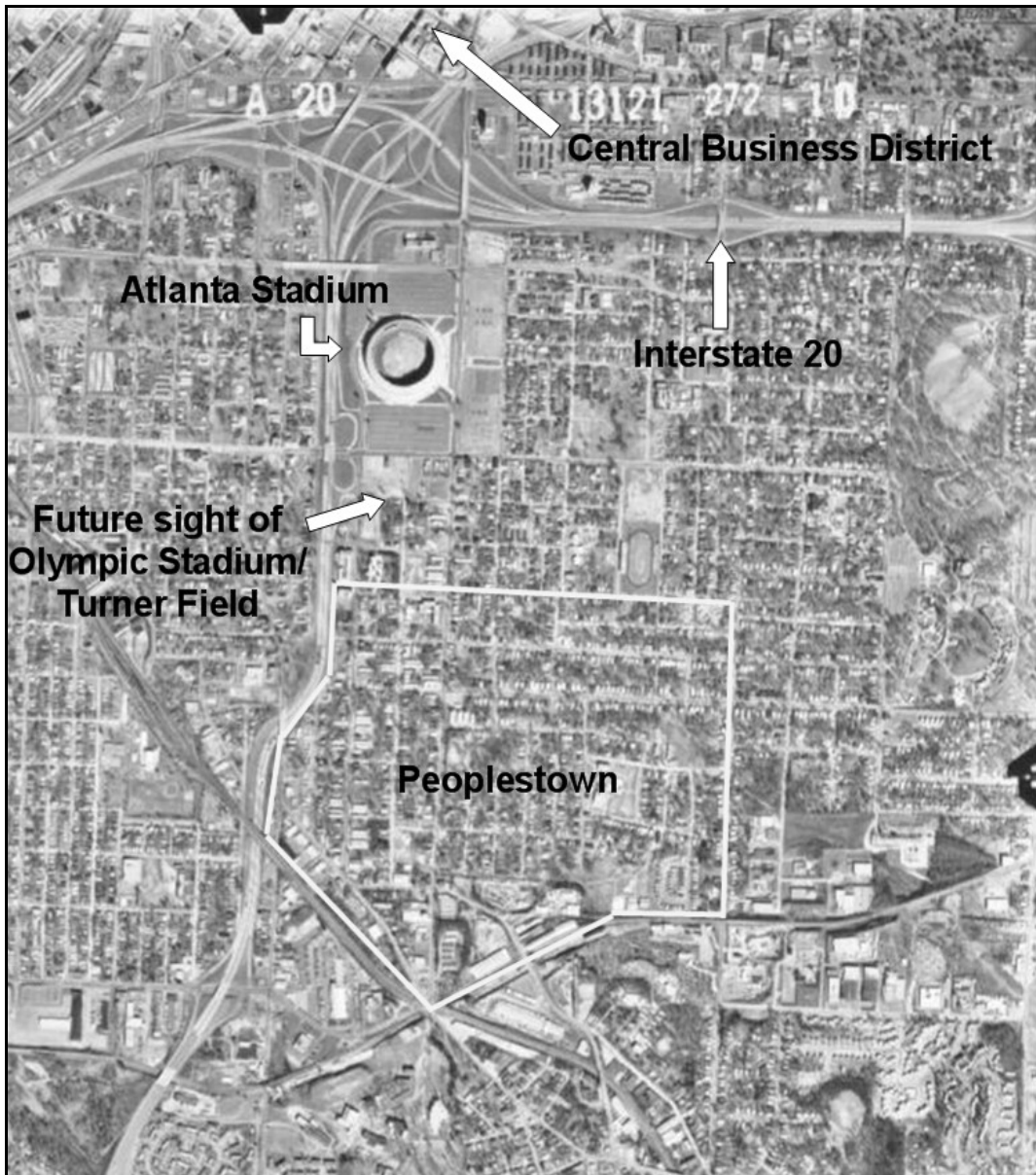
Figure 4.5. Aerial photo of Atlanta, 1972, with completed Atlanta Stadium and Interstate 20
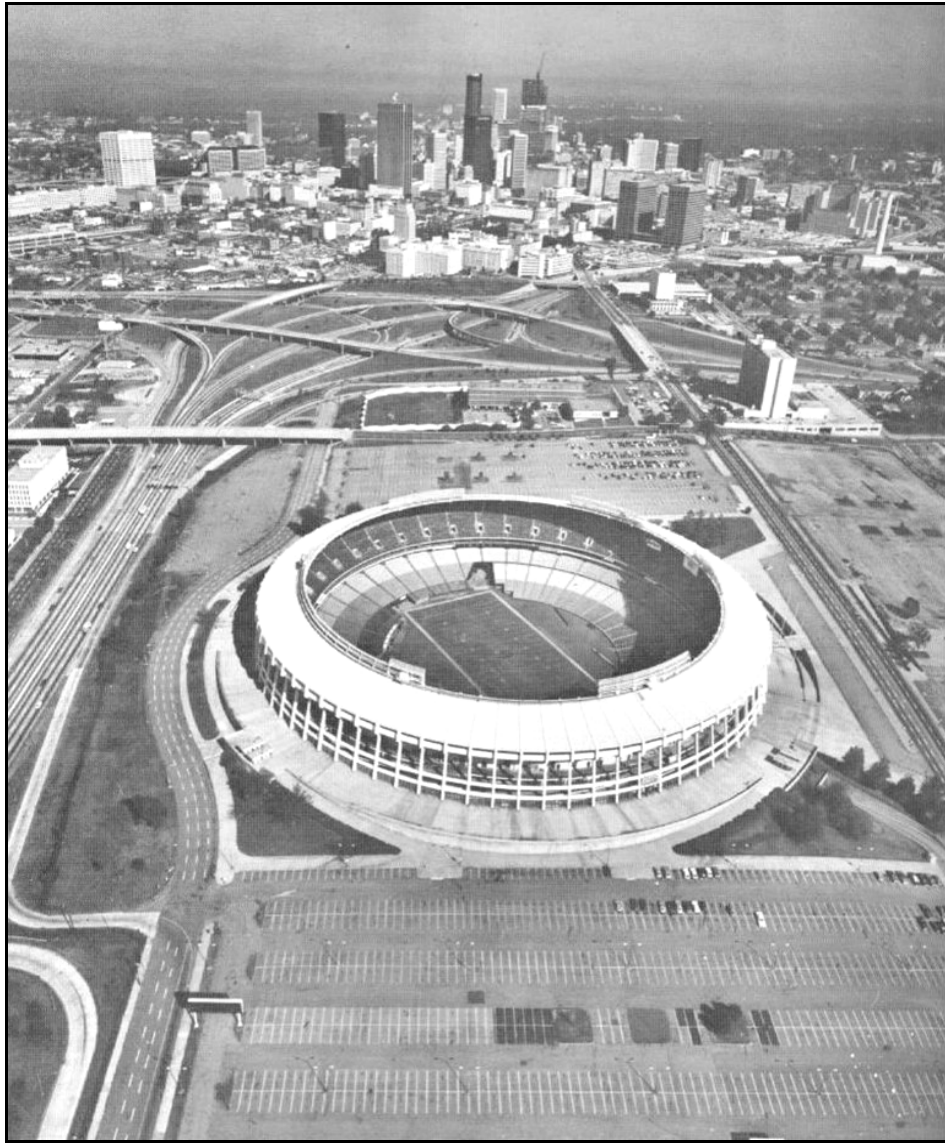
Figure 4.6. Atlanta Stadium shortly after its construction in 1966

The federally funded Model Cities Program caused further changes in Peoplestown and other neighborhoods nearby in the early 1970s. In 1966, Congress passed legislation to initiate the program in response to growing problems of poverty and racial issues in American cities. The program was "designed to encourage participating cities to develop a concerted attack on social and economic problems as well as physical decay" and "emphasized the need for meaningful citizen participation."[74] Grants were awarded to qualifying cities for implementing comprehensive plans in blighted areas to help improve living conditions for low-income communities.

Atlanta was one of 75 cities selected by the department of Housing and Urban Development to receive funding under the Model Cities Program. However, there were initial concerns among residents during the application process, as the "application was prepared quickly and without participation of representatives from the Model Neighborhood Area,"[75] which included Peoplestown. Consequently, residents in Peoplestown and the other neighborhoods of the Model Area "were fearful that Model Cities was urban renewal by another name."[76] City officials insisted that neighborhood representatives would be consulted once funding was received and when the program entered the planning phase. The city outlined bold, long-term objectives in its Model Cities application. One of the primary concerns was a lack of public housing in the selected neighborhoods, and the city's application addressed the issue with several goals, including:

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[74] Marshall Kaplan, Gans, and Khan, *The Model Cities Program: The Planning Process in Atlanta, Seattle, and Dayton*, (New York, Washington, London: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 7.
[75] Stone, 131.
[76] Kaplan, et. al., 18.

Figure 4.7. Focus area of Model Cities Program

- Developing a variety of housing types appealing to and within reach of families of various income levels and family sizes within the model neighborhood

- Achieving harmonious, stable neighborhoods attractive to family groups

- Providing for a substantial increase in the supply of standard housing of low and moderate cost and provide for high quality housing throughout the area[77]

Additional long-range goals included increasing home ownership by 700 units, increasing the number of uncrowded, affordable housing units by 2,000, and providing housing-related social services to residents in the Model Cities Neighborhoods.[78]

Unfortunately for Peoplestown and other neighborhoods in the Model Cities plan, the city failed to capitalize on its objectives. Widespread criticism of the city's handling of the program began to surface in local newspapers and from social service organizations. A 1974 article in the *Atlanta Journal* criticized evaluation reports from the city, which claimed modest levels of success in the Model Cities program, by arguing how the city

> add[ed] up the good parts – new construction and rehabilitation – without subtracting the bad parts, demolition of housing that was beyond repair or was simply in the way of new construction…the 3,000 acres in the Model Cities area southwest of downtown contained 805 fewer housing units in standard condition than it contained in 1970.[79]

In Peoplestown, the Model Cities Program had an impact similar to the urban renewal programs implemented in the neighborhood years earlier. Land that was cleared at the northern edge of the neighborhood became additional parking lots for the baseball stadium. The remaining commercial facilities on Georgia Avenue that served the local community were torn down. By the mid-1970s, the program had "produced only a few small, federally-subsidized

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[77] City of Atlanta, *A Model Neighborhood for Atlanta* (Atlanta: City of Atlanta, 1967), 1-6.
[78] Office of the Mayor, *Atlanta Comprehensive Demonstration Program: Application to the Department of Housing and Urban Development for Supplemental Funds* (Atlanta: City of Atlanta, 1972), I-C-II.
[79] Hank Ezell, "Great Society Dream Now Lies in Tatters," *Atlanta Journal*, 19 August 1974, A1

apartment buildings [that] served to further destabilize the neighborhood."[80] Despite protests

from the community, the city was unable to live up to the promises outlined in their Model Cities

application and provide the neighborhood with much needed housing and economic stimulation.

This continued a trend of further deterioration in Peoplestown, making it difficult to improve

living conditions for its residents.

<p align="center">The 1996 Olympics Games</p>

In the mid-1980s, the city of Atlanta began a campaign to host the 1996 Summer

Olympic Games. This began another round of redevelopment visions in south Atlanta that

impacted Peoplestown and the surrounding areas. In response, community leaders organized a

campaign to protest several redevelopment plans that they deemed intrusive and harmful to

neighborhood vitality. The battle between Peoplestown and the city during the early 1990s

reveals the need for greater leverage within the community to challenge new development,

making local historic designation a more viable option.

One motivating factor for Atlanta's campaign for the 1996 Olympic Games was the city's

desire to build a new baseball stadium adjacent to the 20-year-old Atlanta Fulton County

Stadium, which would be achieved through Olympic revenues. During the four years leading up

to Atlanta's successful Olympic bid, the city struck several deals with the Summerhill

neighborhood, just north of Peoplestown. One of the deals that concerned Peoplestown was an

agreement to build the Olympic Stadium south of the original baseball stadium (which would

later be converted to Turner Field). With Summerhill's endorsement of the Olympic plans, the

city offered "substantial business and government backing for their redevelopment plans…[and]

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[80] Carleton Basmajian, in "History of Peoplestown."

Figure 4 .8. The new Olympic Stadium in 1996, with original Atlanta Stadium in background

immunity for the neighborhood from any new stadium parking."[81] This plan meant construction

of the new stadium would mainly impact Peoplestown and the nearby Mechanicsville

neighborhood. Summerhill, meanwhile, was able to obtain "72.6% of the public and private

money invested in the six neighborhoods surrounding Olympic venues."[82] Peoplestown, along

with Mechanicsville, began to voice opposition to these plans, which

> threatened to shift all the new public parking into the two neighborhoods, threatened to drive
> informal sector parking deeper into each community, and made them subject to more of the
> noise and fireworks impacts of a new stadium. Their opposition to both the private process that
> selected the site and the unmitigated potential impacts cut them off from the fiscal and political
> resources the city, the business elite and the Olympic organizers assigned to Summerhill.[83]

In 1990, community leaders in Peoplestown coordinated with residents in other

neighborhoods to form Atlanta Neighborhoods United for Fairness (A'NUFF) to vocally protest

Olympic redevelopment plans. They opposed the new stadium on the basis of past intrusions

into the neighborhoods from the old stadium, and suggested that the city explore other possible

sites. In response to criticism of Peoplestown's opposition to the new stadium, neighborhood

representatives outlined their perspective in an *Atlanta Constitution* editorial:

> Twenty-five years of urban renewal, stadium building, and highway construction have served to
> maintain this area as an underdeveloped enclave in the shadow of downtown. This is not a
> matter of a selfish, cranky few who oppose "progress," but a matter of many in a community
> resisting the ongoing destruction of a poor working class and predominately African American
> community.[84]

The result was a successful campaign against many of the city's Olympic redevelopment plans

and a series of well-organized revitalization efforts administered by community leaders in

Peoplestown and A'NUFF. Although the neighborhood did not see great benefits from the new

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[81] Keating, in "Peoplestown: Resilience and Tenacity," 19.
[82] Keating, in *Rebuilding Urban Neighborhoods*, 43.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ethel Mae Matthews and Duane Walker, Letter to the Editor, *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 19
December 1990, p. A12

stadium, Peoplestown was able to shift the stadium's site plan one-quarter north of the

neighborhood, receive $100,000 in annual revenue from parking, help coordinate a city

ordinance to prevent informal parking in the neighborhood, and acquire land bordering the

stadium for developing in the neighborhood's best interests.[85]

In the wake of Olympic redevelopment plans, the Peoplestown Revitalization

Corporation (PRC), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, was formed in 1991 by community

leaders to assist with neighborhood improvement strategies. With financial assistance from low-

income community development advocates such as the Enterprise Foundation, the Federal Home

Loan Bank of Atlanta, and the Atlanta-Fulton County Land Bank Authority, PRC was able to

acquire several properties along its northern border to prevent further intrusive development into

the neighborhood. They also used funding to construct new apartment buildings and townhouses

that remain affordable for the neighborhood's low-income tenants. The PRC received a great

deal of help from the Community Design Center of Atlanta (CDCA), a "nonprofit organization

established in 1974 to provide planning and architectural assistance to community-based low-

income groups, neighborhoods, and community development corporations."[86] In 1989, in

response to the proposed Olympic Stadium, the CDCA drew up a detailed report called "A

Development Plan for the Peoplestown Neighborhood." The report addressed several issues

concerning land use, social services, housing, transportation, and environmental impacts, and

offered various planning recommendations to help the neighborhood.

By incorporating a mission of neighborhood revitalization without jeopardizing long-

term residents, PRC has been a key ally to the low-income community. Some Community

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[85] Keating, in *Rebuilding Urban Neighborhoods*, 46.
[86] Community Housing Resource Center, "Community Design Center of Atlanta," available
online at http://www.chrcatlanta.org/directry/CDCA.htm

Development Corporations (CDCs) in Atlanta "have opted, like Summerhill, for a gentrification strategy that, when successful, will increase the housing problems of poor people…the PRC board of directors instead has been steadfast in its focus on building and rehabilitating rental housing that is accessible to the substantial majority of neighborhood residents who are poor."[87] In this regard, the PRC has been striving to preserve the neighborhood's identity that emerged from the impacts of urban renewal and other redevelopment plans in the city. Comprehensive plans for the neighborhood have been "self-generated [and] are based on the notion that the neighborhood's greatest assets are its existing residents, social institutions, and remaining historic structures."[88] These facts strengthen the viability of local historic designation in the neighborhood, as long as the process is administered by the PRC and its incumbent residents to prevent threats of gentrification or displacement.

<div align="center">Current Status of the Peoplestown Neighborhood</div>

An examination of the Peoplestown neighborhood today reveals an interesting mix of residential and commercial structures that are both historic and newly constructed. Historic residential houses are relatively modest and well-maintained Craftsman and Folk Victorian-style structures, and are typically one-story, single-family, with small, neatly-landscaped yards. Newer structures are generally larger, two-story, and are out of scale with many of the historic houses but exhibit an effort by the architects to add some compatible visual character to the historic neighborhood. A few small commercial structures on the neighborhood's borders have been rehabilitated and serve the community. Overall, there is evidence of a concerted effort by property owners to maintain and upkeep their properties. A number of homes that are unkempt

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[87] Ibid, 49.
[88] Pollard Community Web Portal, in "The Peoplestown Community.
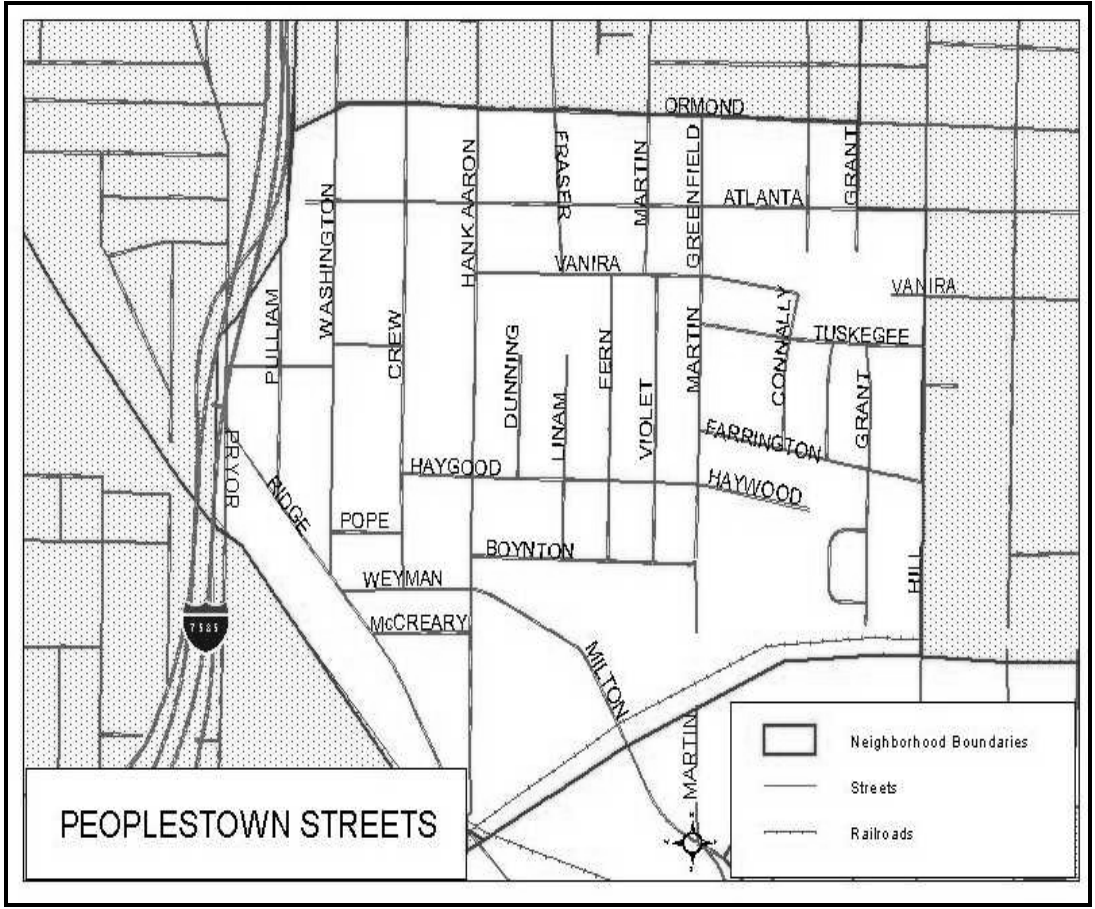
Figure 4.9. Current map of Peoplestown

Figure 4.10. Historic house in Peoplestown

Figure 4.11. Typical streetscape in Peoplestown

Figure 4.12. Historic house in Peoplestown

Figure 4.13. One of only a few larger historic structures that remain in Peoplestown

Figure 4.14. Larger new house in Peoplestown

Figure 4.15. Rehabilitated commercial building in Peoplestown

and deteriorated stand out as eyesores in comparison with the majority of homes in the neighborhood.

Perhaps as important as maintenance of the built environment in Peoplestown is the recognizable vitality in the neighborhood, a reflection of the work accomplished by PRC. On any given day, residents are seen walking to a friend or family member's house or to the local store, conversing with neighbors along the way. New apartment complexes with playgrounds are strategically built within the neighborhood to serve as social centers for Peopletown's youth. Although demographic statistics show that household incomes are relatively low (see Appendix), there is a strong sense of families working together to sustain a high degree of community pride. While the neighborhood remains predominantly African American, it is safe to assume that these elements are a reflection of how Peoplestown once functioned as a diverse, integrated neighborhood with a strong economic base. Given the negative impacts of urban renewal and development on the neighborhood over the past sixty years, it is a great accomplishment to have re-established these elements today through the revitalization process.

<u>The Case for Local Historic Designation in Peoplestown</u>

As outlined by national studies in Chapter 2, the prospect of local historic designation in a low-income, inner-city neighborhood can have several impacts, both positive and negative, on property values and taxes, rental rates, and the well being of incumbent residents. After analyzing growth and development strategies in downtown Atlanta and its adjacent neighborhoods, the case for local designation in Peoplestown remains questionable. The neighborhood, which lacks an abundance of significant architectural structures and lost numerous historic resources due to highway and stadium construction, still shows evidence of deterioration and poorly-constructed, ranch-style rental units built during the urban renewal era.

Figure 4.16. Capitol Homes Apartments, a rehabilitated affordable housing complex in Peoplestown

Figure 4.17. Deteriorating historic house in Peoplestown

However, there are several clusters of modest, single-family and commercial historic structures that remain intact and should be preserved to uphold the neighborhood's remaining historic character. A recent survey of the neighborhood by the AUDC documented about 100 to 200 historic structures and outlined a potential district of more then several city blocks.

The ultimate decision to designate Peoplestown as a local historic district is in the hands of the homeowners and community leaders. Much of this depends on the neighborhood's knowledge and understanding on the impacts of local designation, and the ability to incorporate local designation into Peoplestown's mission of serving the low-income community by providing affordable housing. In a 1991 *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* article on the APC's "Stories Worth Sharing" project, the executive director of the Reynoldstown Revitalization Corporation (RRC) shared his feelings on the prospect of national or local historic designation;

> We want to revive homes for people who live on $7,500 to $16,000, so we have to be cautious…we're talking affordable housing here, not displacing people, not being gentrified, and dealing with historic preservation brings up all those issues. How do you preserve the historic and embellish and enhance it, how do you maintain the flavor of the neighborhood that you do have, how do you create some positive effects, make it more stable – and at the same time, not sell out?[89]

These comments reflect the potential negative impacts of local designation and are a common misconception in the field of historic preservation. Although there are countless examples across the country of revitalized local historic districts that have experienced large increases in property values and taxes, and even gentrification in some cases, local designation is not always the determining factor to these issues. Much of it has to do with location of the proposed district, homeownership responsibility, real estate trends, and the strength or weakness of the local economy.

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[89] Hiskey, A6.

Much like Peoplestown, other low-income neighborhoods near Atlanta's CBD that have

been designated as local historic districts experienced drastic economic and social change due to

urban renewal, Model Cities, and highway construction. However, these areas feature distinct

advantages over Peoplestown that have aided revitalization. Two districts, West End and Adair

Park, were once vibrant, middle- and upper-class suburbs for wealthier white Atlantans before

becoming predominantly low-income, African American neighborhoods in the 1970s.

Revitalization efforts prompted by community organizations were helped greatly by an

abundance of both high-style Victorian structures and modest Craftsman bungalows – typically

on wide, meandering streets – that needed rehabilitation. Both districts are significant in their

developmental history, as they were settled and inhabited by renowned Atlantans such as author

Joel Chandler Harris, speculator George Washington Adair, and local folk hero Anthony

Murphy, a pioneer in Atlanta's early railroad expansion. The neighborhoods also boast

numerous historic commercial buildings that have been rehabilitated, which has provided

economic stimulation and enhanced residential appeal in the area. With their proximity to Clark

Atlanta University, an African American university, there are better opportunities for attracting

middle- and upper-class residents to the neighborhoods, providing jobs for lower-income

residents, and establishing owner-occupied homes.

As a result of successful revitalization in these districts, there has been increase in

property values. In a 2001 local profile, the president of West End Neighborhood Development

recognized the elevated cost of housing, proclaiming that "two years ago, you could have gotten

something for $40,000 or $50,000…now you can't find anything under $100,000, and that's with

Figure 4.18. High-style house in the West End Historic District

Figure 4.19. Large house in the Adair Park Historic District

work left to do on it."[90] A 2000 study of tax assessment values in the West End district saw a

sixty percent increase in total value between 1987 and 1997.[91] Local historic designation,

however, has not been the sole contributor to these factors. Concerted neighborhood efforts to

maintain and upkeep structures within district boundaries has enhanced the community's rich

architectural heritage, which local designation will continue to protect. If the real estate market

is influenced by the greater exposure and prestige that is associated with local designation,

property values and taxes may increase and the threat of gentrification remains. However, these

neighborhoods have stressed and encouraged owner-occupied homes, which has helped with the

maintenance of historic architectural features. Rental rates, meanwhile, have remained relatively

affordable for lower-income residents. Doug Young, a preservation planner with the AUDC,

endorses these factors, noting how

> if a neighborhood was increasing in value and popularity, it would continue to do so. Being in a
> historic district doesn't necessarily make your property values go up. What being in a historic
> district does do sometimes is indicate a grass roots concern about the physical future of a
> neighborhood. Such a grass roots effort might suggest to some people that the neighborhood is
> taking charge of its future and is concerned about what's happening in their neighborhood. That
> might make people more willing to invest or buy homes.[92]

Compared to these neighborhoods, Peoplestown may have less incentive to pursue local

historic designation. Although the neighborhood is ideally located near the CBD, its lack of high

style historic architecture and owner-occupied homes, along with a modest developmental

history, leaves greater emphasis on minimal maintenance and affordable rental units. Economic

development through commercial revitalization would have to include new construction since

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[90] Emily Graham, "West End: Wave of Investment Leads to Area's Revival," *Creative Loafing Online*, 28 March 2001, available online at <http://atlanta.creativeloafing.com/2001-03-28/hothoods.html>

[91] Webb, 89-90.

[92] National Alliance of Preservation Commissions, "Low-Income Neighborhood Designation Issue Study, Pilot Neighborhood: Atlanta, Georgia," unpublished report supplied by author (January 2005)

the neighborhood lacks an abundance of historic commercial or industrial structures. Max

Creighton, executive director of the CDCA and who was instrumental in devising redevelopment

plans for Peoplestown during Atlanta's campaign for the 1996 Olympics, expressed his thoughts

on local designation for the neighborhood in a 2005 interview:

> Historic designations usually are sponsored by homeowners interested in promoting
> homeownership and more frequently than not oppose rental housing in any form. Historic
> planners get passionate about how historic preservation is not necessarily incompatible with
> affordability but in practice it is because it disallows or makes difficult higher density
> development which is necessary in Peoplestown…if affordability is to be part of the future
> planning agenda.[93]

These comments are certainly relevant to the PRC's goal of improving the quality of life for its

residents through residential development and affordable, low-income housing.

Consequently, local designation in Peoplestown depends on the wishes and needs of

homeowners in the neighborhood – ideally those that are owner-occupied – aspects that

community leaders have little control over. Creighton notes how in the neighborhoods near the

CBD,

> turn over rates are high and getting higher – now folk are moving in that have no interest in
> preserving social identity – or more accurately look at their home as an investment and want
> appreciation – code for gentrification…ultimately the market is setting the pace and the CDCs
> can only watch and react to private development because the neighborhoods are small (some
> less than 2000 people) and are limited politically and financially.[94]

In this respect, local designation may not be a factor in impacting property values, displacement,

or gentrification in Peoplestown if outside influences are already involved. Young adds how

> local designation is appropriate for a neighborhood if it meets the minimum criteria to be
> considered (various combinations of architectural, cultural, and historic areas of significance)
> and meets the goals or addresses the problems identified by the neighborhood. It can't address
> all the problems of the neighborhood. Nor is it appropriate if a neighborhood doesn't want
> architectural controls.[95]

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[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.

The key, it seems, would be a cooperative effort between long-standing residents and the PRC to determine if local designation would help protect historic areas from unwanted development and uphold its architectural and social heritage, while finding ways to establish guidelines that would keep structural maintenance affordable.[96] Likewise, the neighborhood would need to study the potential impacts of local designation on economic stimulation through commercial revitalization, notably if higher density development would be affected by designation regulations. A 1991 study of commercial revitalization in the West End and Sweet Auburn Historic Districts found a positive impact on commercial property values, commercial activity, and greater economic development because of historic tax incentives for property owners and the availability of grants and loans for rehabilitation projects. Peoplestown, with its lack of historic commercial structures, may find that "designation without economic inducements could act to stabilize residential areas, acting to prevent conversion to nonresidential uses, and thereby assuring owners of homogeneity."[97] This would allow commercial development to take place outside of district boundaries, ideally administered by PRC to ensure it serves the local community, to encourage "high profile public investments in and around the historic district and direct financial assistance to property owners in the district."[98] Collaboration with the AUDC on all of these elements would be vital.

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[96] See Jo Leimenstoll, "Facing Reality: Design Guidelines for Low-Income Districts," *The Alliance Review*, newsletter from the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions, May/June 2005.

[97] Arthur C. Nelson and Janice Talley, "Revitalizing Minority Commercial Areas Through Commercial Historic District Designation: A Case Study of Atlanta, Georgia," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 13, no. 2 (1991), 231.

[98] Ibid, 232.

<u>Summary</u>

The significant social and economic changes that in occurred in Peoplestown over the past sixty years has not deterred a successful revitalization in the neighborhood through grass-roots community involvement. PRC was formed to serve long-standing, low-income residents who were impacted, directly and indirectly, by urban renewal, stadium and highway construction, and segregation. The identity that emerged in Peoplestown is one of close-knit, low-income African American families and community leaders finding ways to improve their quality of life in a city where growth and development has run rampant. The case for local historic designation in Peoplestown remains questionable, as it is a neighborhood that does not exhibit the associative values of historic preservation, such as unique architectural styles or renowned people and events, but remains a valuable inner-city living space committed to affordability. Its significance lies in the fact that neighborhoods such as these are becoming rarer as cities expand and strive for economic development.

One solution would be to designate a small part of the neighborhood that holds the greatest concentration of historic resources to ensure future residential use. This strategy relies heavily on the percentage of owner-occupied homes and attitudes towards architectural regulations and design review, factors that would influence the potential of higher property values and taxes, gentrification, or displacement if not carefully analyzed. The following chapter discusses other preservation tools that can help prevent these potential negative impacts when local designation is not a viable option, and can assist with a low-income community's revitalization efforts at the same time.

CHAPTER 5

ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES TO ASSIST REVITALIZATION IN PEOPLESTOWN

There are several indications that the prospect of local historic designation in the

Peoplestown neighborhood is less viable compared to other neighborhoods near Atlanta's CBD.

Although an effective strategy in protecting and maintaining historic structures and character,

local designation may contribute to increased property values and taxes, along with changes in a

low-income neighborhood's demographics, sometimes leading to gentrification and the

displacement of long-time residents. Its impact depends on several factors, such as community

revitalization efforts that preceded local designation, the percentage of owner-occupied homes,

location of the district, and real estate market trends. Nonetheless, designation at the local level

is vital to ensure that inner-city neighborhoods will remain residential areas. Over the past 60

years, Peoplestown and PRC have accomplished this through its resilience to urban renewal,

segregation, and intrusive land-use threats, while maintaining its identity as a low-income,

African American community dedicated to neighborhood revitalization and affordable living

arrangements for its residents. However, providing future protection for the neighborhood's

historic resources while continuing a grass-roots revitalization effort is critical and should be a

priority for PRC. In this sense, historic preservation should undoubtedly be an ally to the

neighborhood even if local designation is not the best option.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss alternatives to local designation that could help

protect Peoplestown's historic resources, assist with its efforts to revitalize the neighborhood,

and be a partner in PRC's mission of affordability and economic development for its low-income

residents. With Peoplestown being a predominant rental community and presumably ambivalent

towards design standards and review, it is improbable that local designation at this time would be the best strategy for the neighborhood. However, finding ways to preserve Peoplestown's historic resources, unique identity, and status as a functioning, in-town living place would have positive consequences for future neighborhood improvements. There are several strategies, both preservation-oriented and otherwise, that could help accomplish this.

The neighborhood already possesses one of the greatest assets for developing revitalization strategies – a dedicated, well-organized Community Development Corporation (CDC) – that makes a stronger case for attracting both preservation and non-preservation-based revitalization incentives. This approach to community building has been shown to be an asset for low-income neighborhoods, as it "calls for the design of specific mechanisms that will give neighborhood residents more control over changes and the ability to hold accountable the larger systems that ought to be serving them."[99] There are several other programs that provide technical and financial assistance for the revitalization of low-income, urban neighborhoods, with an emphasis on maintaining historic character.

<center>The Community Partners Program</center>

The National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP)'s Community Partners Program (CPP), established in 1994, "assists preservation organizations, local governments and community development corporations in revitalizing historic properties, central business districts and urban neighborhoods."[100] The program combines funding from several sources to offer loans and grants for revitalization efforts, and provides "housing strategy design for urban historic neighborhoods [and] real estate project feasibility analysis, including evaluations of

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[99] Arthur J. Naparstek and Dennis Dooley, "Countering Urban Disinvestment through Community-Building Initiatives," *Social Work* 42, no. 5 (September 1997), 510-511.
[100] National Trust for Historic Preservation, "Community Partners Program," available online at <http://www.nationaltrust.org/community_partners/>

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financing from a variety of sources."[101] Although some components of the program are geared

specifically for historic districts, there are other incentives such as the New Markets Tax Credit

and Main Street Tax Credit Initiative that promote investment in commercial development in

low-income urban neighborhoods – a potentially valuable element of Peoplestown's

revitalization efforts.

The CPP uses several other strategies to help with low-income neighborhood

revitalization, including "anchoring" preservation projects as the key to neighborhood

reinvestment, promoting mixed-income housing, developing cost-sensitive design guidelines in

locally-designated historic neighborhoods, offering real estate technical assistance to promote

homeownership, and creating local partnerships among community leaders, local government,

lenders, and the state historic preservation office.[102] A recent project in Macon, Georgia's

historic Huguenin Heights neighborhood helped the Historic Macon Foundation (HMF) purchase

one-third of the dilapidated structures in the area through Inner-City Venture Funds, which the

organization then rehabilitated and resold to low-income residents. Thanks to local partnerships

between HMF, the local community and the city, there was a significant rise in appraisal values

while crime in the neighborhood dropped by 85% over a five year period.[103] A similar project in

the historic Lavaca neighborhood in San Antonio, Texas involved developing cost-sensitive

design guidelines which became an important factor for the community in pursuing local historic

designation. Community Partners representatives organized a task force that "developed a

cost comparison of different products, materials and methods of repairing or replacing the

critical features of typical neighborhood housing styles…then forged guidelines

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[101] Cohen, 674.

[102] National Trust's "Community Partners Program" website.

[103] National Trust for Historic Preservation, "Historic Macon Foundation's Huguenin Heights Project a Model Partnership," available online at: http://www.nationaltrust.org/loan/MHF.pdf

Figure 5.1. Rehabilitated house in Huguenin Heights neighborhood, Macon, Georgia

that reflected affordability, energy efficiency, environmental safety, marketability and historic character."[104]

The Preservation Development Initiative

The NTHP also administers the Preservation Development Initiative (PDI), which provides grants for comprehensive surveys of historic, low-income neighborhoods that are experiencing revitalization. One of the primary goals of the program is to help "local leaders make preservation a central part of their community's broader economic and community development strategy."[105] Recipients of grants receive a preservation assessment of their neighborhoods that is "conducted by a multi-disciplinary team of preservation development experts to analyze and identify possible barriers and advantages to preservation-based development."[106] Reports have already been drawn up in two Georgia cities, Macon and Columbus, that outline several observations and recommendations concerning transportation, commercial development, and heritage tourism.[107] This strategy could be ideal for Peoplestown if it incorporated a study of other neighborhoods in the CBD that are not locally designated and are similar in architectural style and socioeconomic standing, such as Pittsburgh and Mechanicsville.

The Community Reinvestment and Home Mortgage Disclosure Acts

If the Peoplestown community explores the option of local historic designation in the future, one of the keys will to be to increase the number of owner-occupied homes. While PRC

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[104] National Trust for Historic Preservation, "San Antonio's Lavaca Neighborhood Develops Cost-Sensitive Neighborhood Design Guidelines to Protect Historic Character," available online at:
http://www.nationaltrust.org/loan/Lavaca.pdf

[105] National Trust for Historic Preservation, "Preservation Development Initiative," available online at < http://www.nationaltrust.org/pdi/index.html?cat=2>

[106] Ibid.

[107] Reports in PDF format can be viewed at the Preservation Development Initiative website
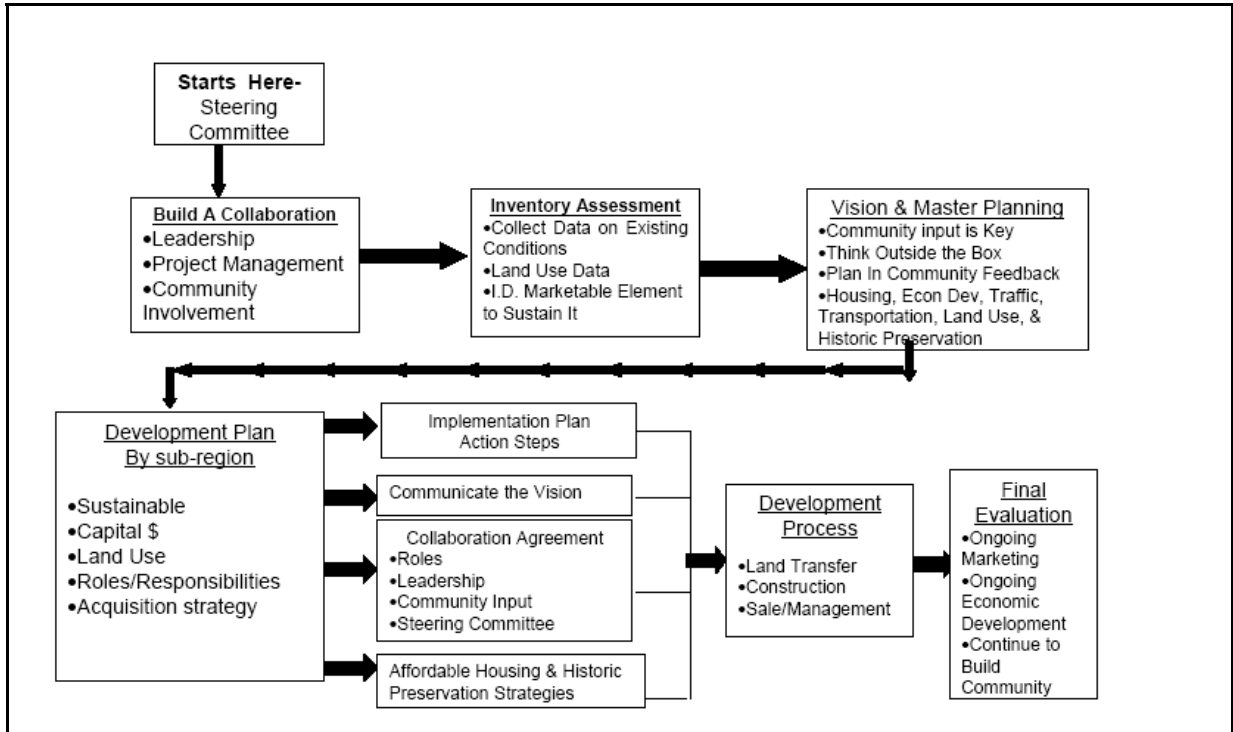
Figure 5.2. Community revitalization planning analysis for Mid-Town neighborhood, Columbus, Georgia, in its Preservation Development Initiative report

has kept the focus on acquiring, rehabilitating, and constructing affordable apartment complexes and single-family homes, the percentage of renters in the neighborhood (85%) makes it difficult to gain a consensus of property owners in support of local designation. The task of establishing more owner-occupied homes in Peoplestown would also be challenging because of the number of low-income residents in the neighborhood. Moreover, lending institutions have traditionally been less eager to provide loans in the neighborhoods near Atlanta's CBD because of the area's stagnant economic growth and low-income status. However, federal legislation was passed decades ago to help prevent these trends, and could be useful tool for PRC to promote and establish homeownership and commercial investment in Peoplestown.

In response to redlining tactics used by lenders in the early 1970s, low-income housing advocacy groups helped persuade Congress to pass the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) in 1977, legislation that ensures "lenders serve the credit needs of their entire community, including low- and moderate-income neighborhoods." The CRA was soon followed by the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA), which "requires lenders to disclose where they are making home mortgage loans."[108] These acts have proven to be allies to historic, inner-city neighborhoods by guaranteeing fairness in lending practices, promoting owner-occupied homes, and helping with the rehabilitation of historic residential and commercial structures. The CRA and HMDA were strengthened in 1989 by the passing of the Financial Institutions Reform, Recovery, and Enforcement Act (FIRREA), which expanded the amount of information to be disclosed by lenders in their application review process. By putting more emphasis on case-by-case evaluations of all applicants, the FIRREA helps prevent the threat of gentrification in low-

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[108] Jennifer L. Blake, "Information Series No. 56, 1992: Using the Community Reinvestment Act in Low-Income Historic Neighborhoods," (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1992), 1.

income neighborhoods and historic districts by ensuring equal opportunity in lending procedures. All in all, these pieces of legislation enable CDC's to evaluate and assess lending activity to use to their advantage in the low-income community and identify discriminatory lending practices.

Utilizing this legislation would help establish greater levels of homeownership in Peoplestown because it was "designed to assess the lender's efforts to meet local credit needs and to encourage innovative partnerships with other lenders, community groups, and local government"[109] These components would also benefit homeowners in a potential local historic district because of higher levels of maintenance and upkeep of historic structures, as "acquisition and rehabilitation loans are a prerequisite for maintaining and improving [a] neighborhood's building stock."[110] PRC would be able to assist low-income residents in pursuing homeownership because the CRA allows CDCs to challenge lenders to provide credit counseling for first-time home buyers. With proper management of these strategies, Peoplestown could witness a greater percentage of owner-occupied historic structures, leading to greater care of the neighborhood's historic resources, increased protection against intrusive development, and a better case for establishing a local historic district.

<div align="center">U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Programs</div>

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) offers various programs to assist low-income neighborhoods with community revitalization and affordable housing, some with an emphasis on historic preservation as a partner in these neighborhood planning strategies. For Peoplestown, these programs can serve as additional catalysts for establishing owner-occupied homes and protecting the neighborhood's historic resources and identity. HUD's HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME), a popular federal block

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[109] Ibid, 2.
[110] Ibid, 1.

grant program, is utilized by state and local governments exclusively for providing affordable

housing for low-income residents. Some of the focus issues under HOME include homebuyer

assistance programs, financial support for homeowner rehabilitation, tenant-based rental

assistance, and the creation of   Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDO), a

private nonprofit, community-based service organization whose primary purpose is to provide

and develop decent, affordable housing for the community it serves. The city of Atlanta

administers HOME funds in the form of grants or deferred loan payments to owner-occupied

households at or below 80% of the Atlanta Metropolitan Statistical Area Median Income

(AMSAMI) for rehabilitation projects. These funds were instrumental in the construction of new

apartments complexes in Peoplestown for low- to moderate-income senior citizens. A push for

more homeownership programs by PRC could lead to additional funding under the city's HOME

program.

HUD's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program has also been

successful in helping cities revitalize low-income neighborhoods, including Atlanta, which

utilizes the CDBG Loan Guarantee Program (Section 108 Program) to fund large-scale economic

development projects. CDBG financing centers on affordable housing, homeownership, and

economic stimulation through new business opportunities and job growth in low-income

communities. One focus of the CDBG program is finding ways to use funding to support

historic preservation and heritage tourism projects. A recent HUD publication titled "A Guide to

using Community Development Block Grant Funds for Historic Preservation and Heritage

Tourism in your Communities" outlines eligible preservation-related activities that can be funded

through the CDBG program, as long as they "benefit low and moderate-income persons, prevent

Figure 5.3. Historic structure and potential commercial rehabilitation project in Peoplestown
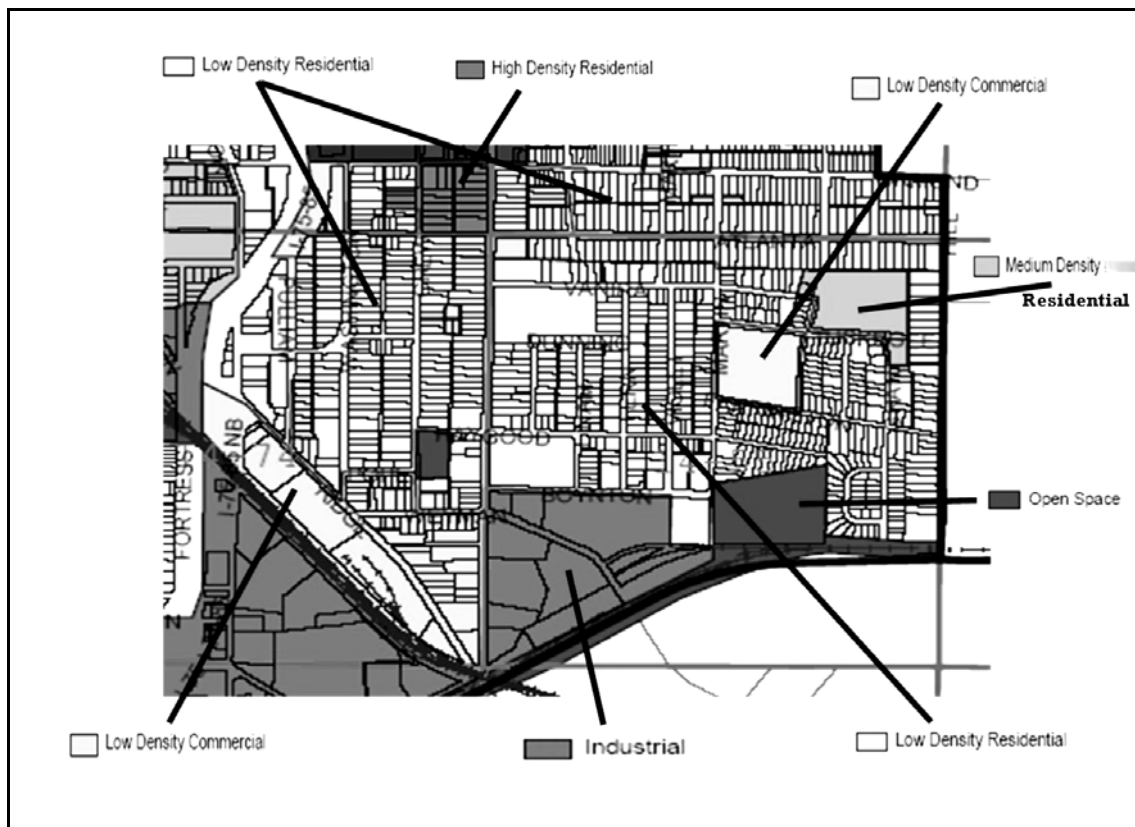
Figure 5.4. 2004 future land use map for Peoplestown

or eliminate slums or blight, [and are] designed to meet a community development need."[111] Aside from the rehabilitation of private and publicly-owned historic structures, these activities may include "new construction of non-residential buildings, economic development assistance to for-profit businesses, and energy conservation."[112]

The report provides detailed information on how funding can be used to support preservation activities in a low-income community, such as surveys and preservation plans, acquisition of historic properties by non-profit entities, engineering and design costs, technical assistance, and supporting the activities of local CDCs. It also offers incentives for supporting preservation activities with CDBG funding, including tax credits and a reduction of urban sprawl. The city of Atlanta's future land use map shows a significant portion of Peoplestown's western border as low-density commercial (see Figure 5.4), which would be an ideal starting point for establishing commercial activity in the neighborhood with CDBG funds. Exploring this strategy could allow Peoplestown to protect its historic resources, encourage local business opportunities, create more jobs in the community, and strengthen a push towards local historic designation in the neighborhood.

Peoplestown has experienced a great amount of self-generated revitalization that has improved living conditions for its low-income residents and has helped preserve an identity for a community that has grown out of poverty and depressed economic conditions, along with the negative impacts of segregation and urban renewal. This chapter has explored ways for historic preservation to provide assistance in these efforts without detracting from the neighborhood's

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[111] U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "A Guide to using Community Development Block Grant Funds for Historic Preservation and Heritage Tourism in your Communities," available online at: http://www.hud.gov/utilities/intercept.cfm? /offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/library/historicpreservation/historicpreservation.pdf, 2.
[112] Ibid, 3.

goals. In many ways, Peoplestown is a unique community that may not need this assistance

because of its successful internal efforts and lack of significant architecture and history.

However, as the city of Atlanta continues to grow and seek new areas for development, there

should be initiative within the neighborhood or from external sources to explore the option of

local designation or other preservation tools. If carried out in a way that is sensitive to the

neighborhood's economic and social status, it could prove to be a worthy undertaking.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to accomplish several goals: to analyze local designation's impact on social and economic factors in a historic, low-income neighborhood, to measure the value of those neighborhoods that lack the significant elements found in many historic districts across the country, to re-evaluate the notion of preserving a community's identity, and to explore ways that historic preservation can help in revitalizing neighborhoods such as Peoplestown. Further studies should include re-examining the AUDC's designation criteria, for the purpose of developing new standards that are sensitive to neighborhoods that lack significant architectural resources but are still valuable as inner-city living places with rich cultural histories. Other studies could further explore the possibility of developing a comprehensive preservation plan for the Peoplestown neighborhood that would include the rehabilitation of commercial structures and the feasibility of attracting mixed-income residents.

In comparison with locally designated neighborhoods near Atlanta's CBD, it appears that local designation is not a viable option for Peoplestown at the present time. Without a high percentage of owner-occupied homes, significant architectural resources, and commercial activity, it seems that the priority for the neighborhood and PRC is to continue providing affordable housing for long-term residents. While other neighborhoods have promoted their historic architecture as a means of luring young professionals into the area, Peoplestown has taken a different approach by encouraging a stronger sense of community pride to serve as the base for protecting its resources and upholding its identity. However, with the recent construction of larger and more expensive houses in the neighborhood that are out of scale with

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the typical single-family, Craftsman-style structures, Peoplestown faces the prospect of losing

some of its historic character and possible gentrification without a comprehensive preservation

plan and. The areas of the neighborhood that have less-significant architecture could be prime

targets for new construction that follows this same model. In this sense, both the city and the

neighborhood should explore options to help protect Peoplestown from the threat of unregulated,

new development in order to maintain the neighborhood's identity and historic resources. To be

successful, there must be a community preservation plan that is not over-stringent and is

sensitive to the low-income residents of Peoplestown. Ideally, local historic designation would

be the solution. Todd Schneider's 2001 study of the impact of historic preservation philosophies

on lower-income communities concludes with the assertion that "low-income people are not

threats to historic districts, nor are preservationists inherently biased against low-income

residents," and that cooperation between the two groups can help "achieve the preservation of

historic buildings and the reduction of poverty."[113]

Nonetheless, neighborhoods that lack examples of high-style architecture or important

people and events are often overlooked by traditional preservation criteria. However,

neighborhoods similar to Peoplestown will be as valuable in fifty years as the landmark

structures and sites that are protected today. Their value will not be measured by the standard

characteristics that we use to suggest the "significance" of a historic structure or site. Their

significance lies in the importance of livable, self-sustaining neighborhoods in a time when new

development and sprawl has become virtually uncontrollable. One of the most important aspects

of the Peoplestown neighborhood is an identity that is not typical of many communities that have

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[113] Todd Schneider, "From Monuments to Urban Renewal: How Different Philosophies of
Historic Preservation Impact the Poor," *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law & Policy* 8, no. 1
(Winter 2001), 281.

developed in America. The African Americans in Peoplestown who experienced the negative

impacts of urban renewal, highway construction, Model Cities and the Olympics were forced to

adapt to poor living conditions, lack of job opportunities, inadequate public transportation, low

wages, and substandard educational facilities. In the process, the neighborhood developed a

whole new identity that was equally influenced by mid-twentieth century social ills – such as

segregation and racism – that subsequently became historically significant over the past sixty

years. When considering local designation in Peoplestown, there should be recognition that

preserving this new sense of history is just as important as preserving the valuable inner-city

living places that are becoming increasingly rare as cities expand. Historic preservation's role in

this process must do more than just recognize the significance of historic structures. There must

be more acknowledgement of the factors that helped shape a neighborhood's development, even

over the past ten or twenty years, to help provide a greater quality of life for those who

experienced a continuous change of identity.

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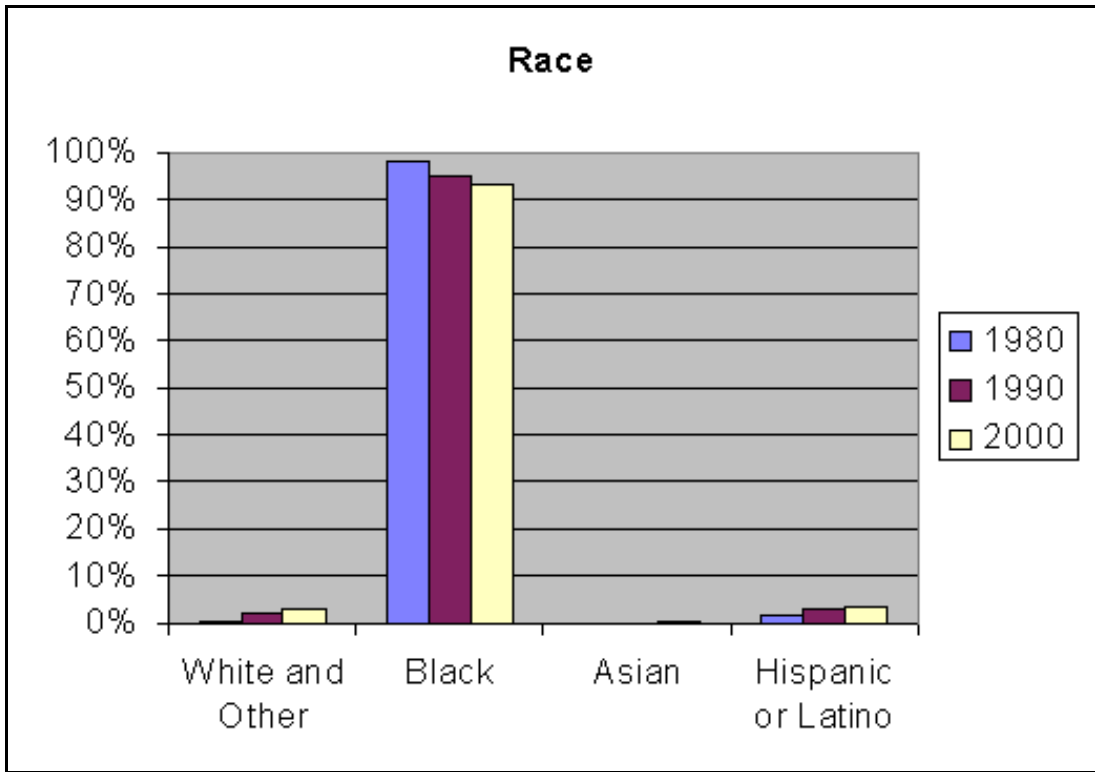
APPENDIX: PEOPLESTOWN DEMOGRAPHICS
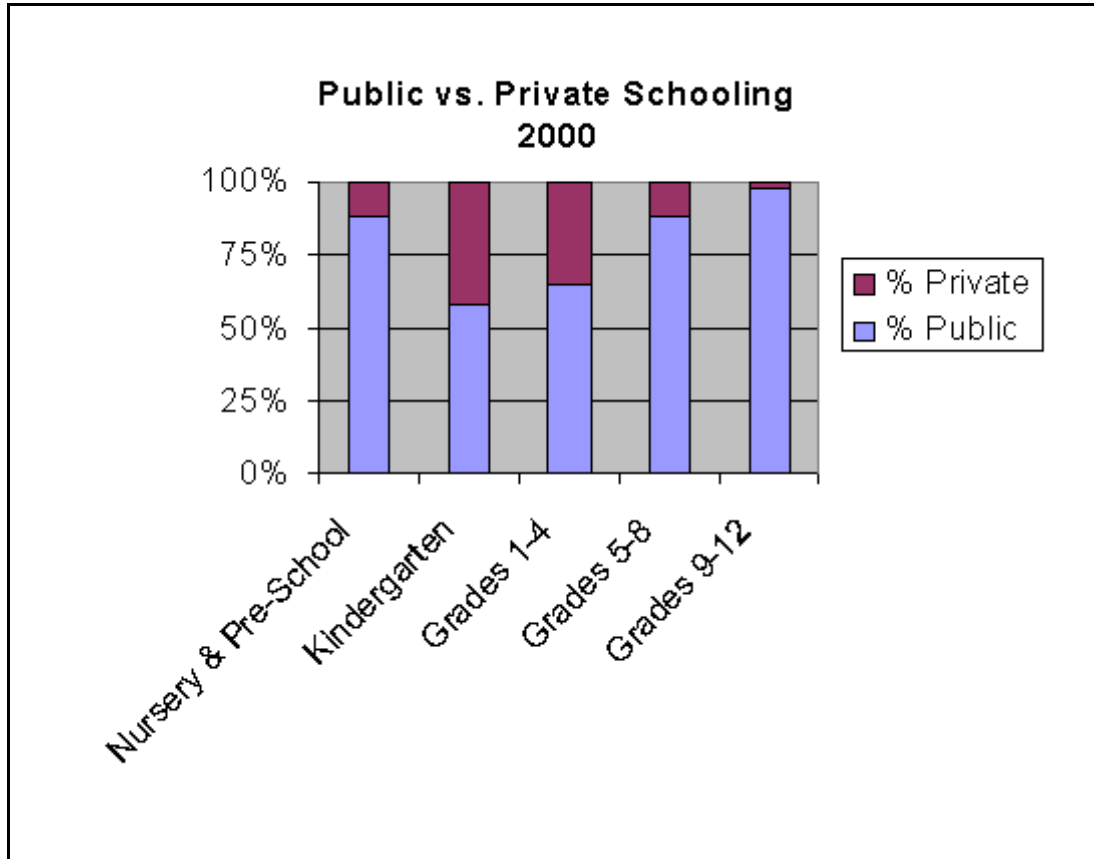
<u>I. Population, Race, Age and Education</u>
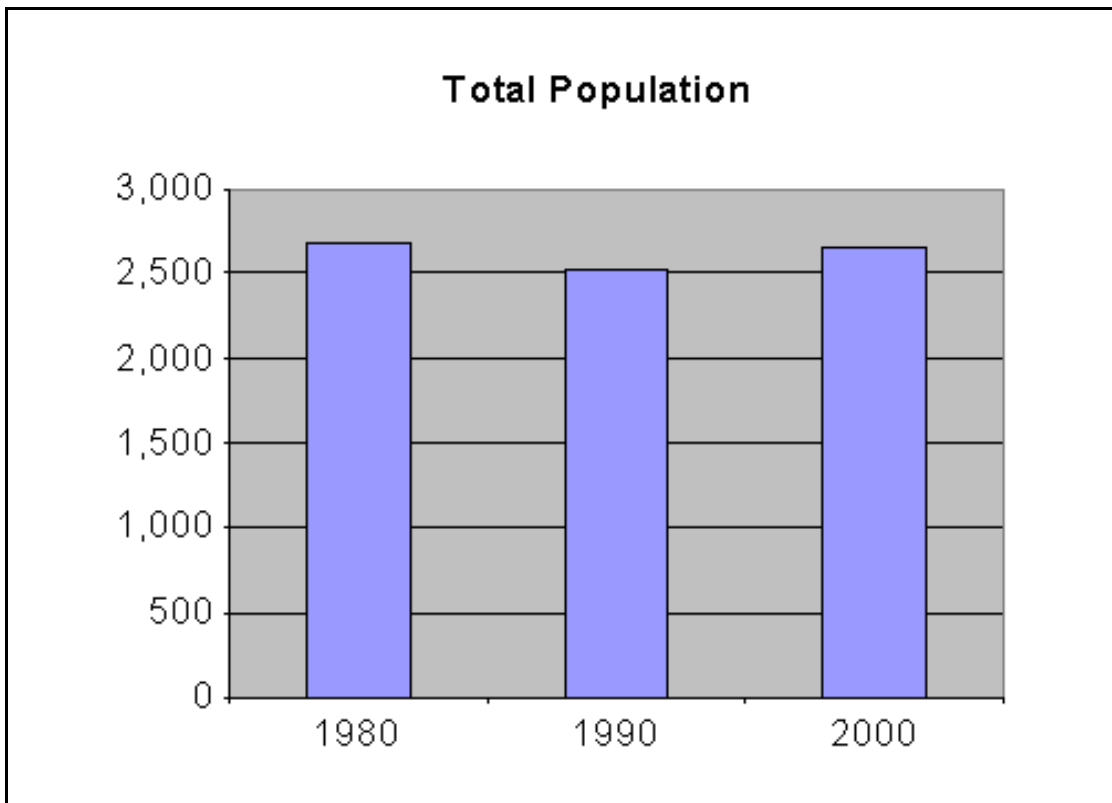
Total Population

Year	Population	% change
1980	2,688	N/A
1990	2,527	-6.0%
2000	2,656	5.1%

	1980	1990	2000
Total	2,688	2,527	2,656
White and Other	0%	2%	3%
Black	98%	95%	93%
Asian	0%	0%	0%
Hispanic or Latino	1%	3%	3%

Public vs. Private Schooling 2000

	Public	% Public	Private	% Private	Total
Total	776	72%	295	28%	1071
Nursery & Pre-School	60	88%	8	12%	68
Kindergarten	181	58%	132	42%	313
Grades 1-4	239	65%	130	35%	369
Grades 5-8	165	88%	22	12%	187
Grades 9-12	131	98%	3	2%	134

2000 Population by Age
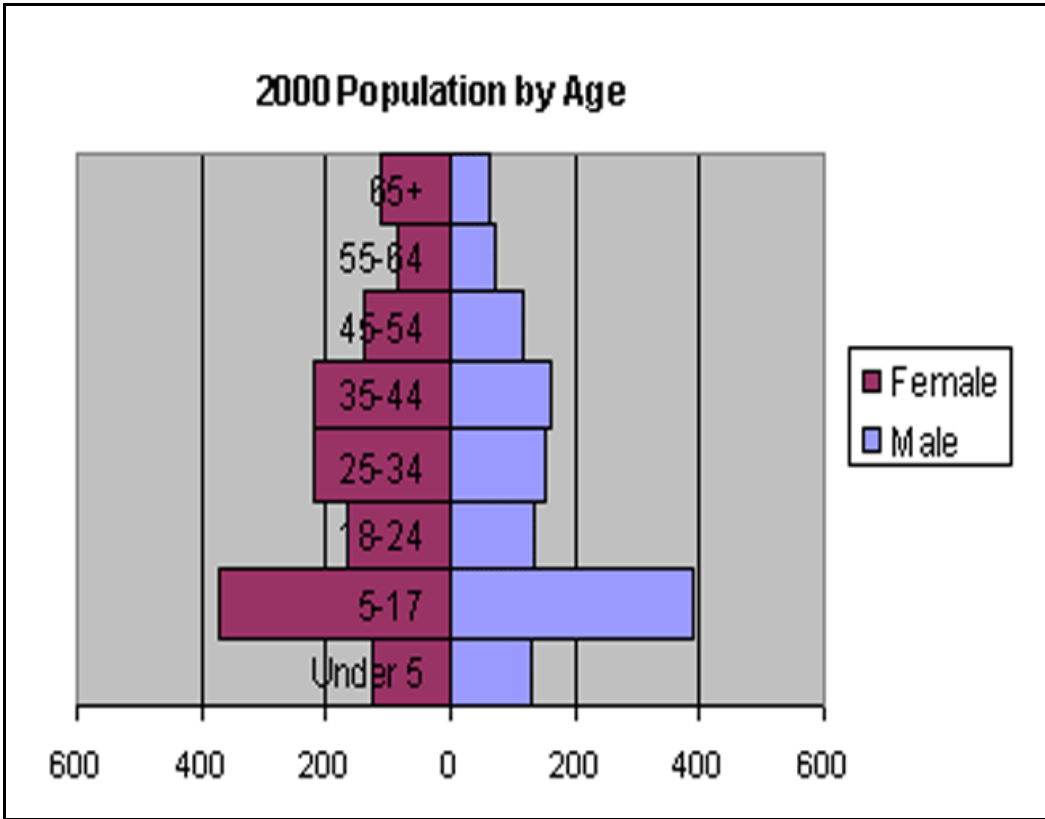
	Median Age
1980	25.5
1990	24.1
2000	24.2

Race by Educational Attainment 2000
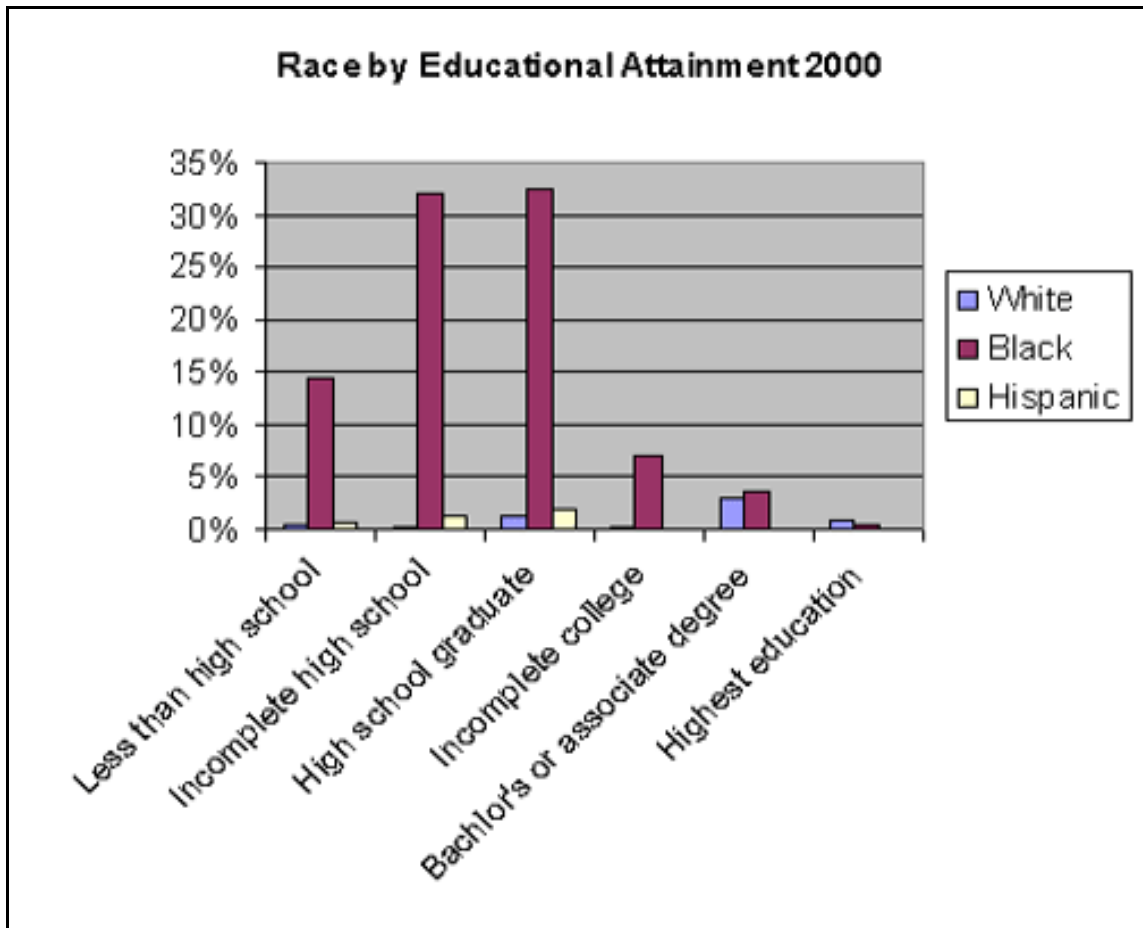
	White	White %	Black	Black %	Hispanic	Hispanic %	Total
Less than high school	6	0%	201	14%	8	1%	1,397
Incomplete high school	3	0%	449	32%	19	1%	1,397
High school graduate	20	1%	453	32%	26	2%	1,397
Incomplete college	3	0%	98	7%	0	0%	1,397
Bachlor's or associate degree	41	3%	51	4%	0	0%	1,397
Highest education	13	1%	6	0%	0	0%	1,397
Note: White=white non-hispanic, Black=Black alone, Hispanic=Hispanic or Latino							

Sex by Educational Attainment for Population 25+
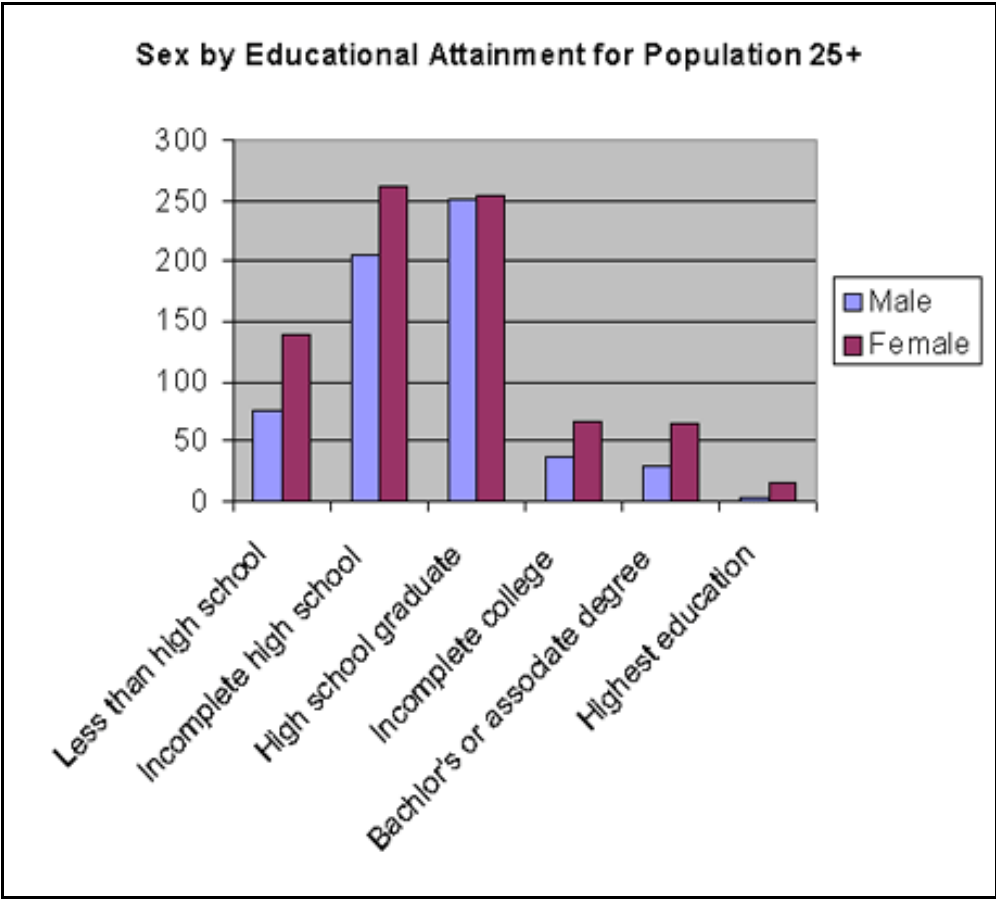
	Male		Female		Total
Total	603	43%	802	57%	1,405
Less than high school	76	12.6%	139	17.4%	215
Incomplete high school	206	34.1%	261	32.6%	467
High school graduate	251	41.6%	254	31.7%	505
Incomplete college	37	6.2%	67	8.3%	104
Bachlor's or associate degree	29	4.9%	64	8.0%	94
Highest education	4	0.6%	16	2.0%	20

Total Family Households vs. Family Households
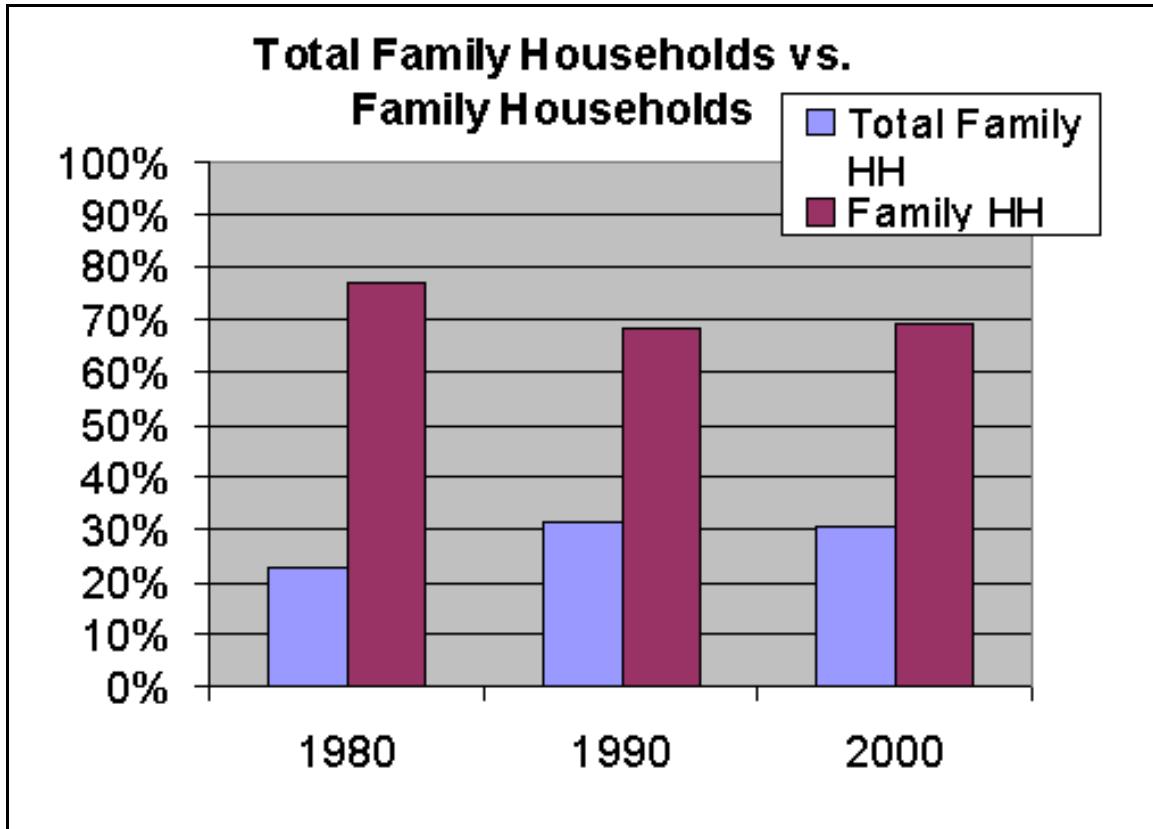
Year	Total Family HH	Family HH	% Non-Family HH	% Family HH
1980	781	602	23%	77%
1990	872	599	31%	69%
2000	870	604	31%	69%

Household Size (%) 2000
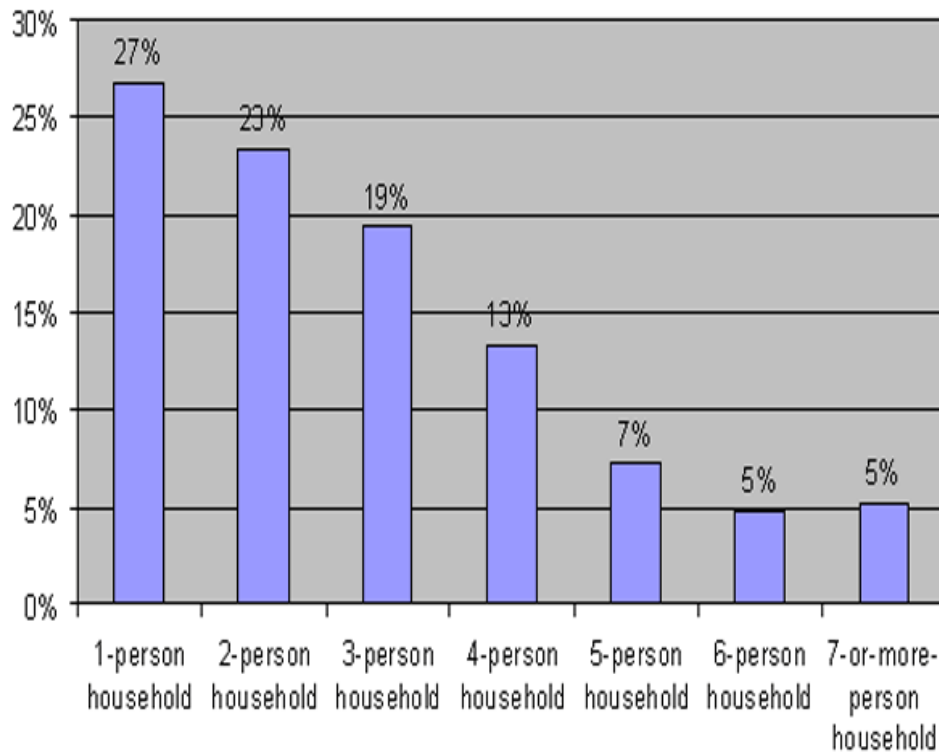
	2000	%
Total:	875	438.42
1-person household	235	27%
2-person household	204	23%
3-person household	170	19%
4-person household	117	13%
5-person household	63	7%
6-person household	41	5%
7-or-more-person household	45	5%
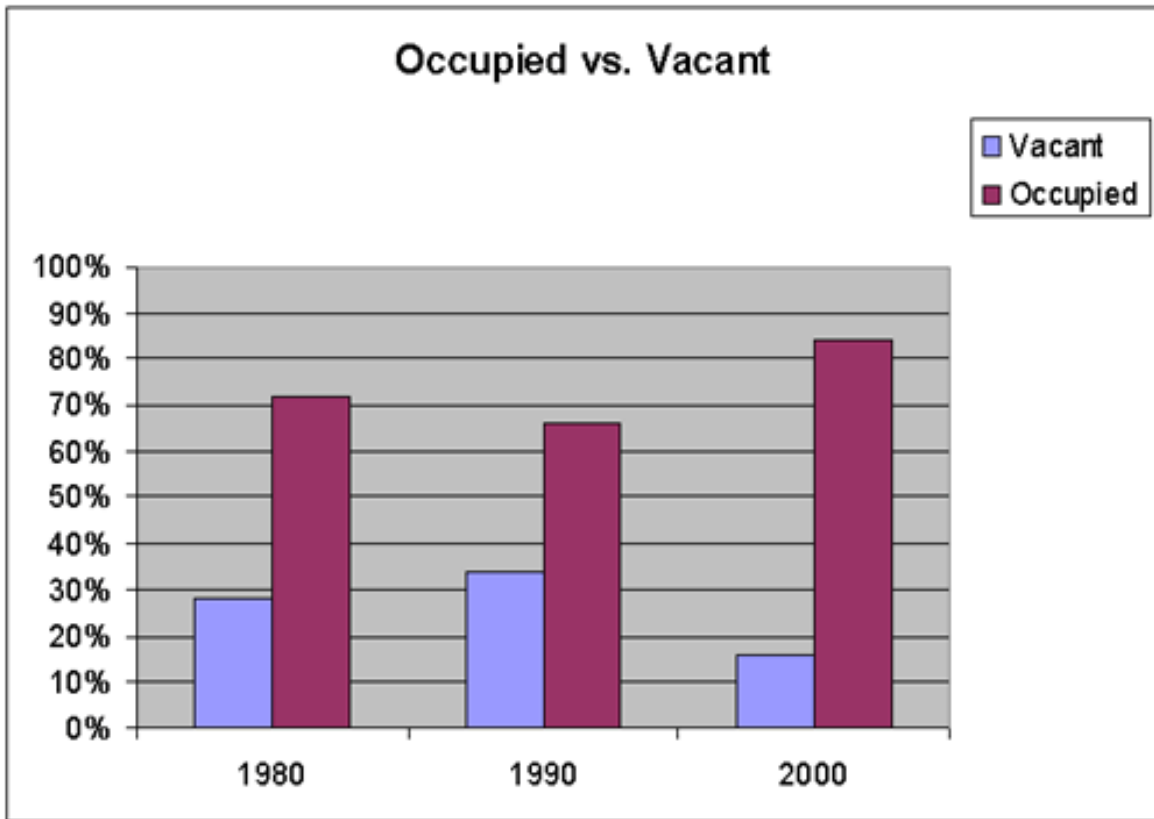
Occupied vs. Vacant

	1980		1990		2000	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Housing Units	1212		1175		1035	
Occupied	872	72%	779	66%	870	84%
Vacant	340	28%	396	34%	165	16%

Gross Rent Distribution 2000
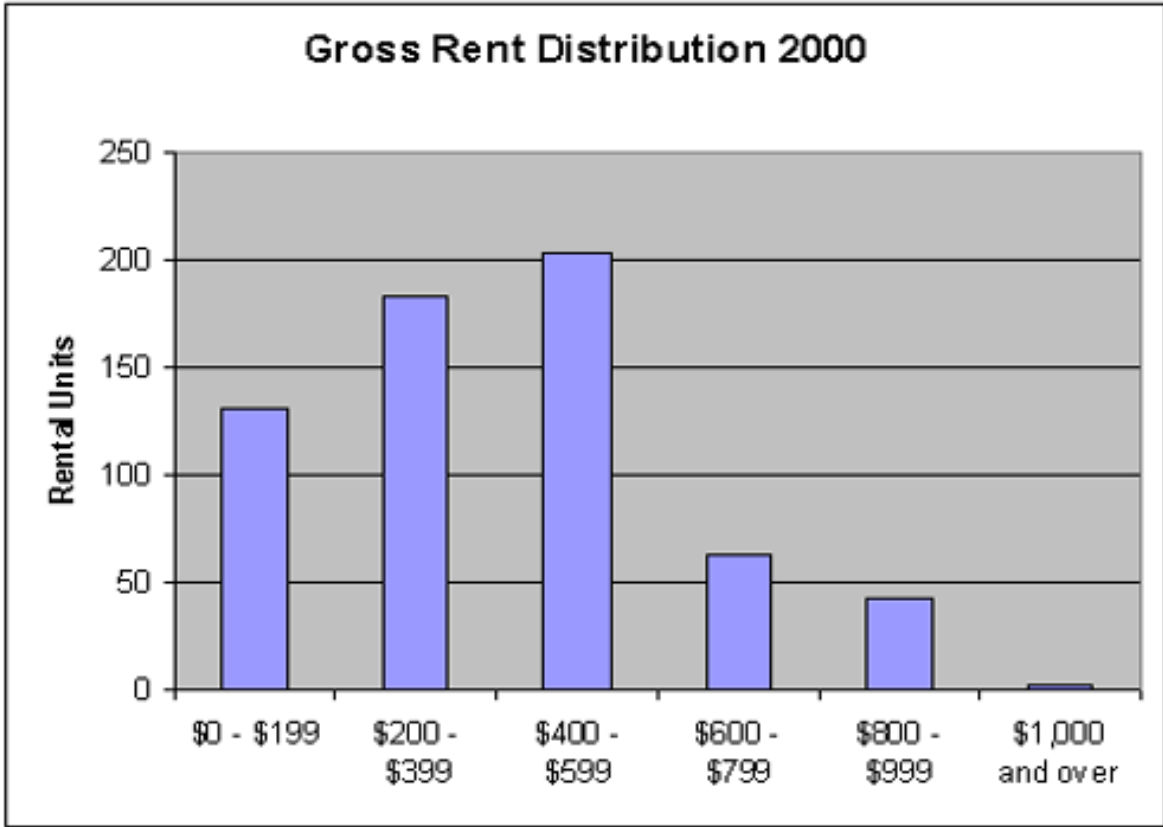
Gross Rent	Number of Rental Units	Percentage of Total
$0 - $199	132	21%
$200 - $399	183	29%
$400 - $599	204	32%
$600 - $799	64	10%
$800 - $999	43	7%
$1000 and over	3	0%
Total (With Cash Rent)	631	100%

Distribution of Home Values
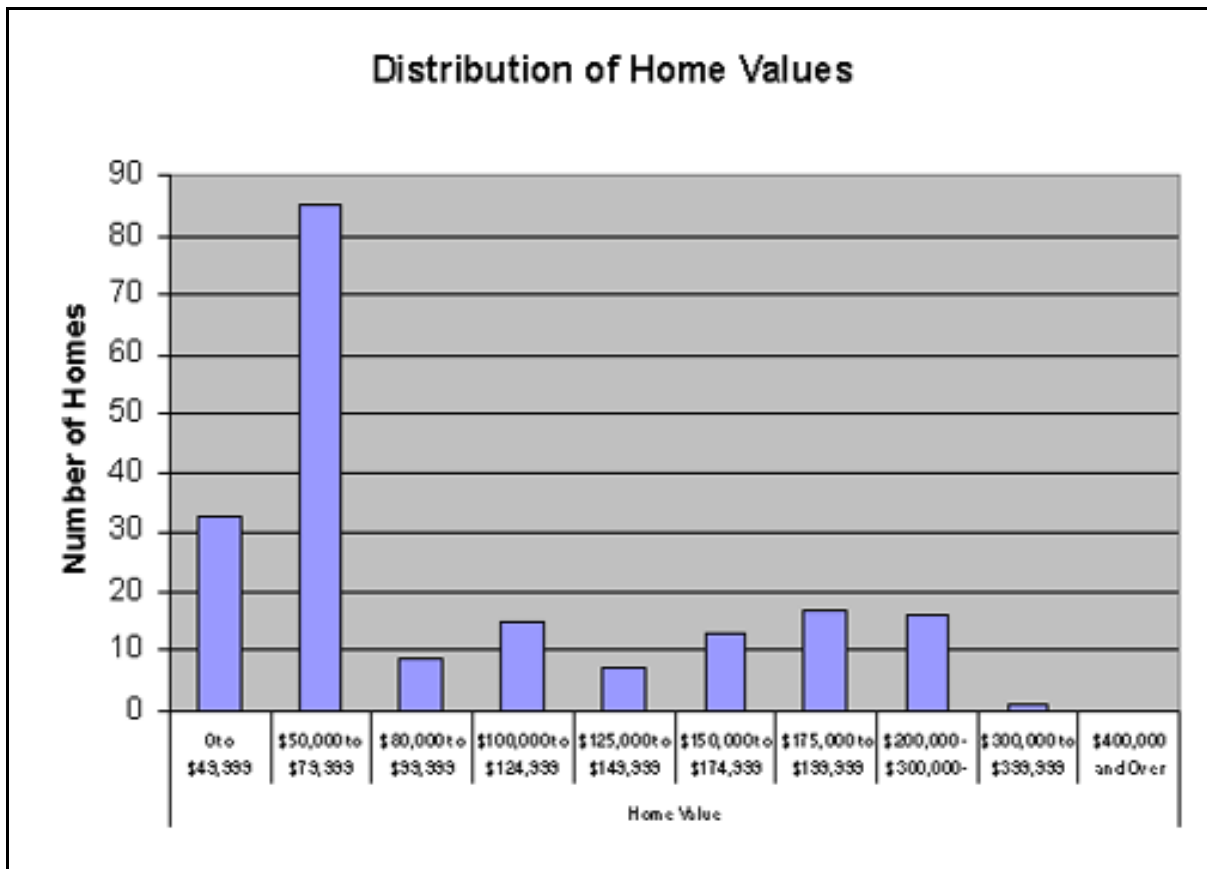
Home Value Range	Number of Homes	Percentage of Total
0 to $49,999	33	17%
$50,000 to $79,999	85	43%
$80,000 to $99,999	9	5%
$100,000 to $124,999	15	8%
$125,000 to $149,999	7	4%
$150,000 to $174,999	13	7%
$175,000 to $199,999	17	9%
$200,000 - $300,000-	16	8%
$300,000 to $399,999	1	1%
$400,000 and Over	0	0%
Total	196	

Median Gross Rent

(Inflation Adjusted to 1980 Dollars)
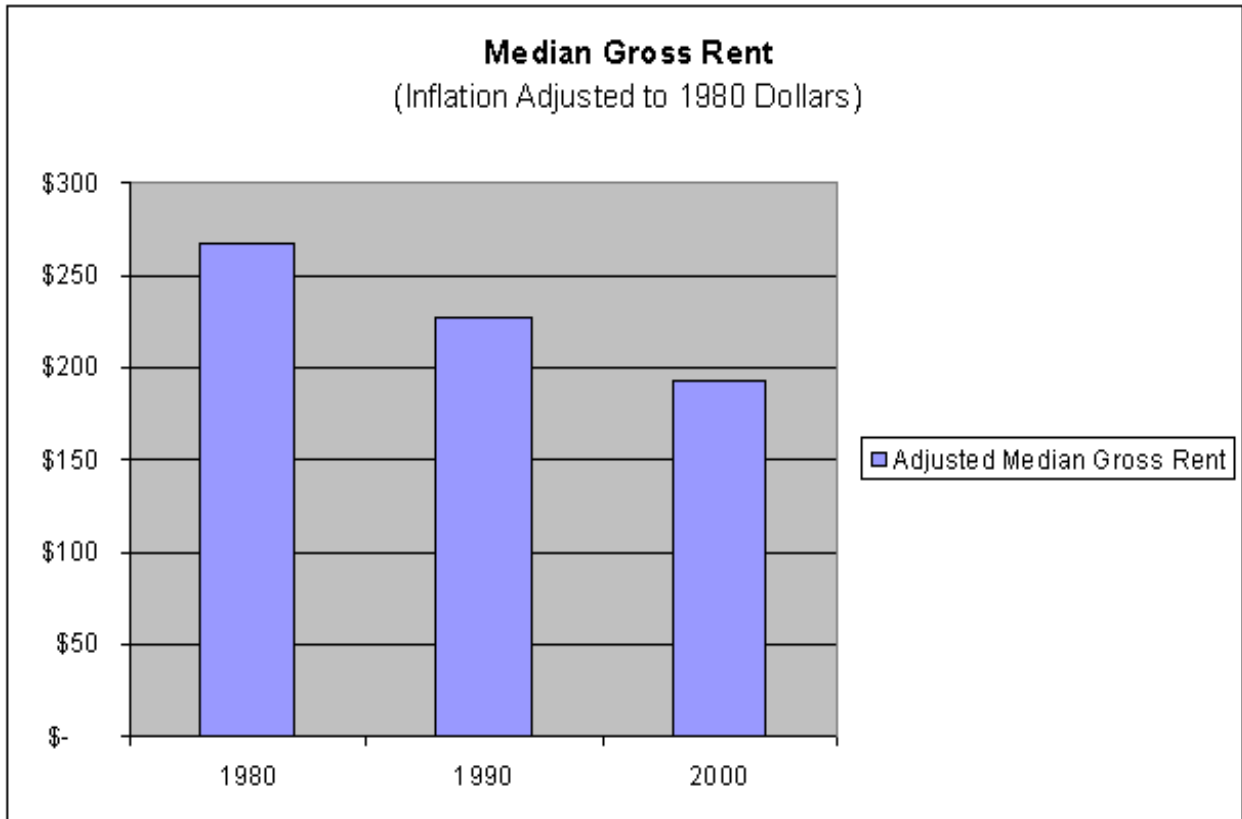
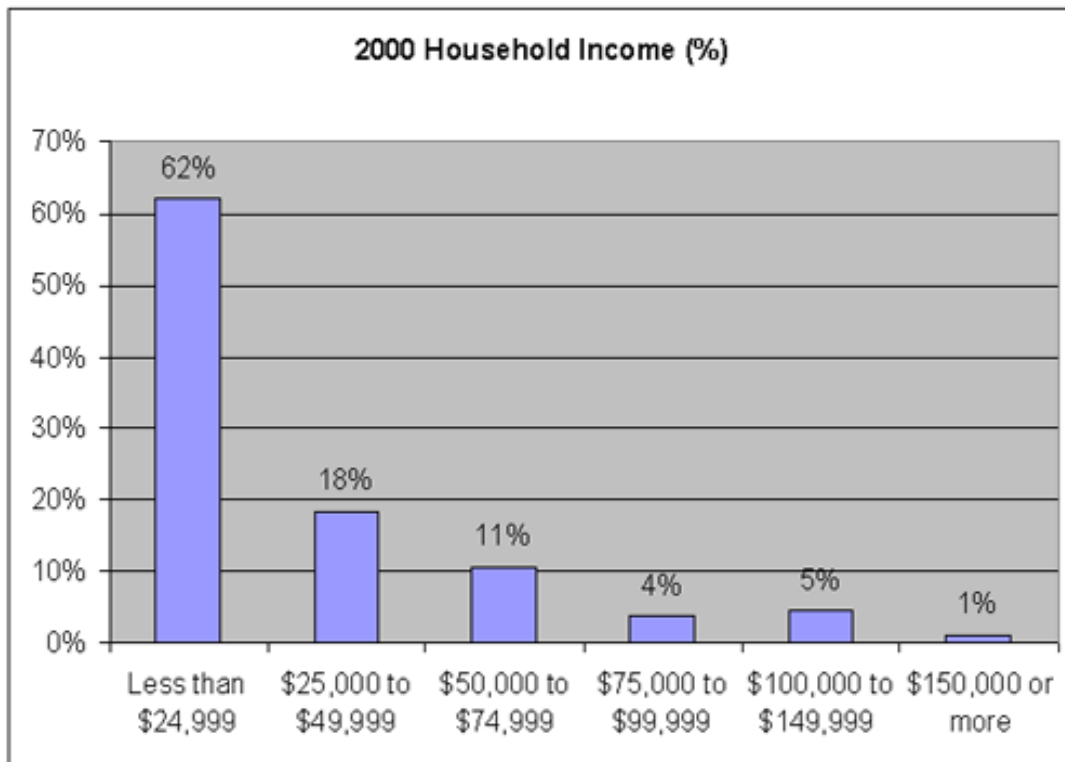|	1980	1990	2000
Median Gross Rent	$ 267	$ 359	$ 401
Adjusted Median Gross Rent (1980 Dollars)	$ 267	$ 226	$ 192
Percent Change in Adjusted Gross Rent		-15%	-15%

Median Home Value
(Inflation Adjusted to 1980 Dollars)
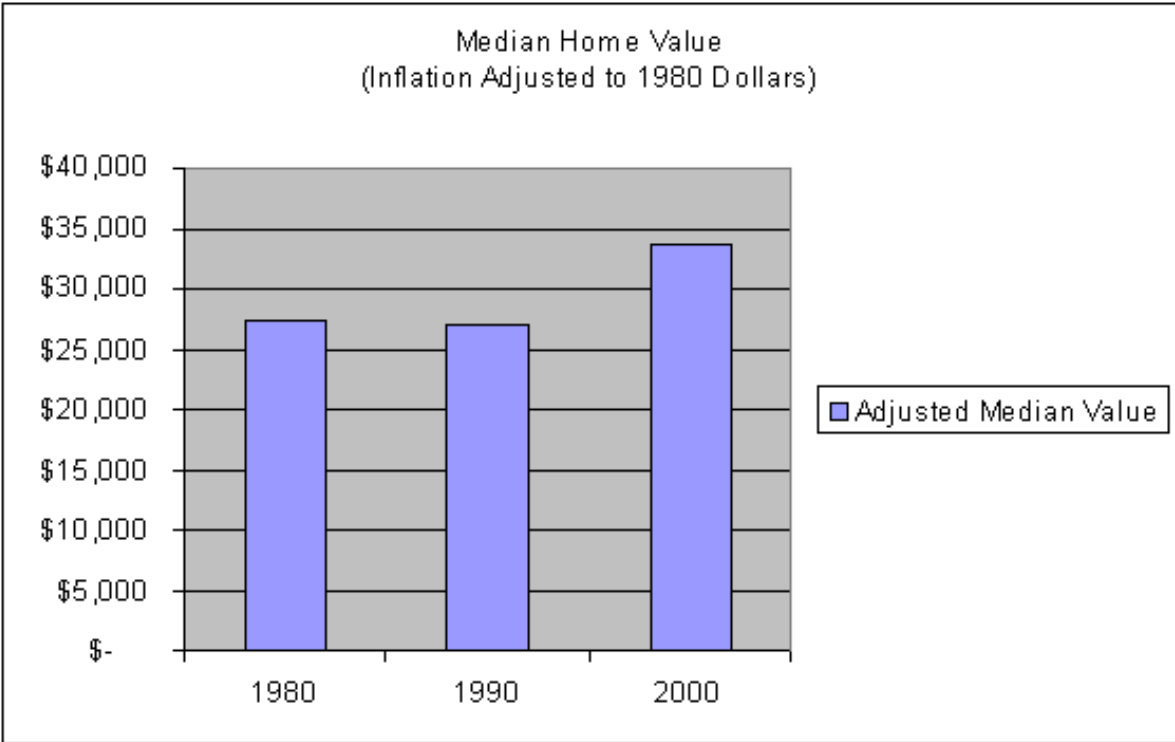
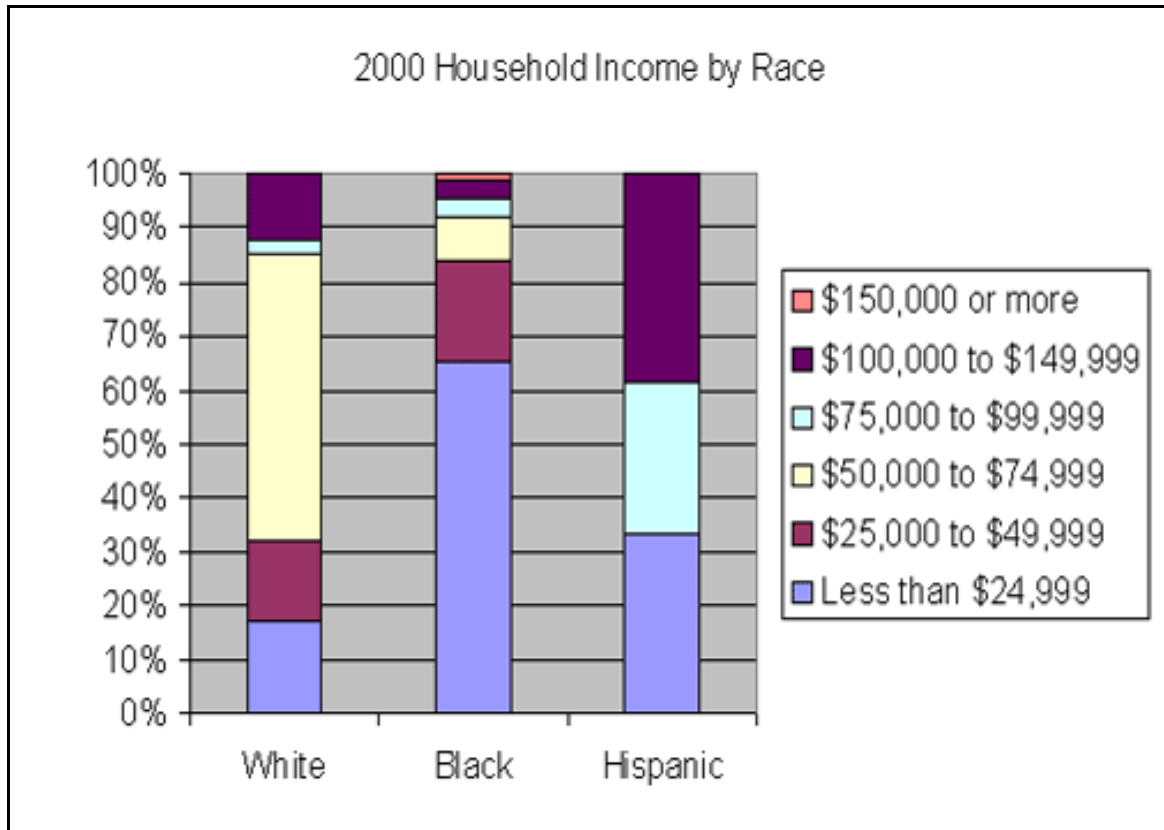|	1980	1990	2000
Median Home Value	$27,342	$42,800	$ 70,500
Adjusted Median Home Value	$27,342	$26,983	$33,735
Percent Change in Adjusted Value		-1%	25%

III. Income

2000 Household Income (%)

	2000	%
Total	866	100%
Less than $24,999	537	62%
$25,000 to $49,999	158	18%
$50,000 to $74,999	91	11%
$75,000 to $99,999	31	4%
$100,000 to $149,999	40	5%
$150,000 or more	9	1%

IV. Employment

2000 Household Income by Race

	2000							
	White	%	Black	%	Hispanic	%	Total	%
Total:	41		800		18		866	
Less than $24,999	7	17%	521	65%	6	33%	537	62%
$25,000 to $49,999	6	15%	148	19%	0	0%	158	18%
$50,000 to $74,999	22	54%	69	9%	0	0%	91	11%
$75,000 to $99,999	1	2%	25	3%	5	28%	31	4%
$100,000 to $149,999	5	12%	28	4%	7	39%	40	5%
$150,000 or more	0	0%	9	1%	0	0%	9	1%

Sex by Employment Status
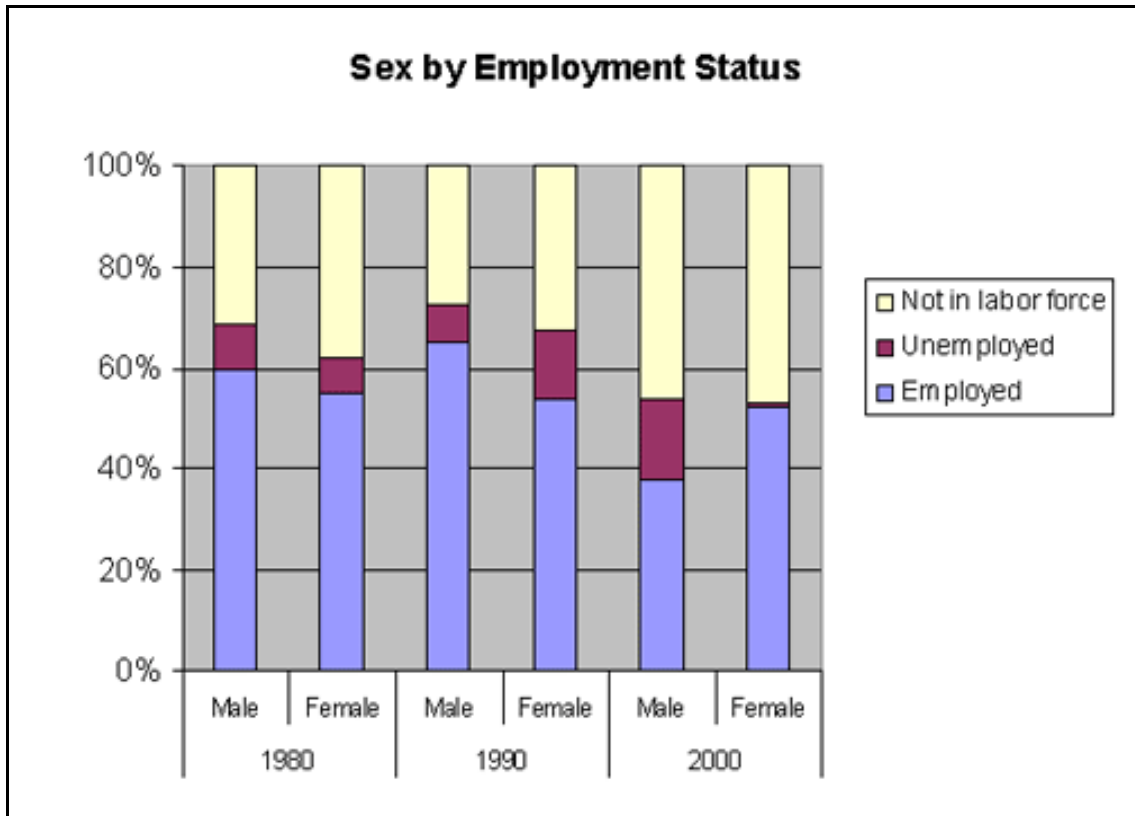
	1980		1990		2000	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Totals by Sex:						
In labor force:	431	410	393	490	430	543
Civilian:						
Employed	376	363	355	395	303	537
Unemployed	55	47	38	95	127	6
Not in labor force	198	249	151	239	369	481

Source: Georgia Tech College of Architecture, 2000 study, online at:
http://www.arch.gatech.edu/~dapa/reports/atlneighchg/page-Images/v05.html